

If You Like Pina Coladas
Parashat Terumah; February 23, 2007

Years ago I had the privilege and great honor to be present at the dedication of a Catholic cathedral. A decade of planning had gone into the building, fundraising throughout the diocese, effort and energy and no expense spared. The result was magnificent: detailed work everywhere the eye would roam, symmetry and craftsmanship, and a polished gleam so that the entire sacred space practically shone with light.

As I sat amongst the invited delegates, the clergy guests from other faith traditions, there was commentary back and forth about the opulence and the splendor. Some of my colleagues were from high church traditions, used to pomp and ceremony and elaborate ritual; others were from the so-called low-church faiths – traditions which place a premium on simplicity, whose focus is almost entirely oral as opposed to visual. Some, in other words, were drawn in by the surroundings, elevated, uplifted. It was a gateway to grandeur. For others it was overdone, a distraction. And I... I always suspected that the difference between the two had more to do with temperament and taste... than with tradition and theology.

But I learned two lessons sitting with my colleagues that day. The first was a matter of theology, as one of the ministers joked with me about my taking communion. I told him that my cousin had done so once, just to see what the wafers tasted like, and he laughed and

indicated that, well, my cousin was not really supposed to have done that. I asked what would happen should I stand up and get on line, and was told that – and I still find this hard to believe, but this is what I was told – that the priests could not refuse to give me communion. But that they would make certain assumptions and conclude that as a rabbi I was probably in the wrong line of work. I learned, then, that, in Catholic tradition, at least as relayed to me by a Protestant minister, judgment of one's worth and spiritual readiness must come from within.

The second lesson is related to the first. I learned great *chochmah*, great wisdom, great Torah even, from the words of the visiting speaker... Cardinal O'Conner of New York. He, too, looked around at the detailed work with approval. But he uttered words I will never forget. The shine, the gleam, the sparkle on the surface, this he admired. But the true test of a sacred space, he said, was – and this was his phrase I believe: “how shine the secret places.” Not just what is in a building. But what is in our hearts.

He didn't quote the verses, as I recall, but I will, now, from this week's portion, from the story of the world's first every Temple building fund, from the cathedral we could carry, in the wilderness and the world. *“V'asu aron atzei shitim; amatayim vacheitzi arko, v'ama va'chaitzi rochbo, v'ama va'chaitzi komato. V'tzipita alov zahav tahor, mibayit u'michutz...* They shall make an ark of acacia wood, two and a half cubits long, a

cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. Overlay it with pure gold – inside and out...”

Gold on the outside. It goes on everything: the ark, the cover, the cherubim, the rings, the lampstand, the pans and the poles. Everywhere the eye can see glitters gold.

But why... why on the inside? Why is the interior covered, why the place which no one will see. It is a receptacle, not like our arks of today. So why the inside?

And the Talmud teaches: from this we learn that a wise person whose inside and whose outside do not match is not genuinely wise. How shine the secret places?

Gold, on the inside as well as the out. For who are you, when no one is looking? In the moments when there is just you, only you... but still, you are not alone. There is one who sees the hidden places. There is you. And there is God. Every move you make...

And the space we are in? A building, a sanctuary, a sacred space... all of the choices made, the style chosen, simplicity of grandeur, the art and the symbolism, all of it, all of it – it matters, yes, but it matters not in and of its own sake. It matters in an instrumental way, how it works, and where it points. For the architecture is an arrow, that must fly in two directions. The sparkle of love, the flame of faith, the beauty and the light must shine... both outside, and in. Both, at once.

The eye is never filled with seeing. Our vision must not stop at beauty, but move to a place beyond.

It is forbidden, the Talmud tells us, to have a synagogue without windows. For the light must shine – not only in, but also out. We must never be so surrounded with our own images that we fail to see what is in the world beyond. To be connected with the community. To bring the words we say and the values we teach... to the world the way it is.

A window on the world. And a window on our soul.

The other day, waiting at a store, the soft musak in the background broke through to my consciousness. It was a song from my youth, but I had never really paid attention to the words. But the other day they struck me, so powerfully, in fact, that you may hear this imagery from me again, perhaps even at the High Holy Days.

It is a song about a man who is tired of his relationship, and just plain bored. “Like a worn-out recording of a favorite song.” So he picks up the paper, and his eyes wander to the personal ads. There he sees something so exciting that he writes, he responds, he arranges to meet the woman who wrote the words. There he waits, in a bar, for an affair...and, as you have probably either remembered or guessed... in walks the author of the ad... his own wife.

The couple laughs, and he says to her that he never knew that she liked Pina Coladas, and getting caught in the rain. The feel of the ocean

and the taste of champagne. Making love at midnight, in the dunes of the Cape. She's the lady he's looked for: come with me and escape."

The couple laughs. But I almost cried. It was almost a sadness beyond words, coming out at me from the words of a ridiculous song.

I flash for a moment on the words of another half remembered song, a political satire by Arlo Guthrie directed at Richard Nixon. "You say you didn't know, that the cats with the bugs were there. And you'd never go for that kind of thing nowhere. But that just isn't the point, man. That's the wrong, wrong way to go. Because if you don't know about that one... well then what else don't you know?"

How much it is, that we do not know of one another. Are the most intimate relationships of our lives, not still capable of surprise? Or do we think that we are in a rut, a routine, a predictable and superficial zone where comfort and boredom meet and embrace? Is there not a spark, a surprise, a gleam of energy and beauty waiting, just around a corner, just beyond the vision of our everyday sight?

In our lives, in our love, how, then, do we open up that which is inside? How do we see the treasure that each one of us carries? And do we hide the gold inside... out of fear of exposure, or because we have forgotten that it is there?

How shine the secret places? It is not a question of *whether* the goodness, the godliness, is in us. It is a question... of whether we open

up to each other. Whether we let anyone see into the inner us. And whether we let that goodness out.

Shabbat Shalom.