

Shabbat Ki-Tisa ShaLom



by Phyllis Chesler

One is somewhat uncomfortable when God claims that Betzalel, the artist and master craftsman, is only capable of building the mishkan because “God filled him with the Divine spirit, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge.” (31: 1-3). Does God really need such credit? Perhaps, but also not really. Rather, we are the ones who need to acknowledge God’s role in our lives; there may be eternal rewards for learning

this lesson. For example, Betzalel belongs to the tribe of Yehudah—he is Leah’s fourth son, whom she named in order to praise or thank God.” (29:35). Even Hava recognized the role that God played in her giving birth to Cain: “Kaneeti Esh et Hashem.” (4:1).

This very week, I experienced God’s hand in a drama in my own family. I had to rush my partner, to the hospital. The process flowed as if a Divine Hand was at my back: the doctor-friends in the building who came immediately; the ambulance driver and medic who did as well; my son who rushed to help us; the physicians and nurses at Mt Sinai—and then there’s this. My late, very dear chevrutah, Rivka Haut’s daughter, a leading neurologist, called me right back as I sat in the ICU. It seems that she had been the neurologist’s on duty beloved professor (he said she was “wonderful”), and I put them on the phone with each other. I knew at that moment that all would be well.

And it was. My partner failed or passed every test. She has no diagnosis. She believes I may have saved her life. Ah, not I. Clearly, God’s reward for my very limited efforts to study Torah.

The two paintings above were given to me by German-born Israeli artist Shoshanna Heimann who both studied and taught at Betzalel. I was privileged to know her in the 1970s. They are enigmatic, companion portraits.