

**TREE OF LIFE**

(Continued from Page 1) famous little church at Chamoni. Many artists, including Matisse, had contributed works. 'But, Father,' I objected, 'you know that I am a Jew.' 'If this fact does not disturb you in considering the work, it does not disturb us,' he replied. This answer pleased me very much, and I said that I would think the matter over. I consider myself to be a religious Jew, although I am not a bigot.

"In 1947, when I was in the U.S., he came from Canada to see me again. I told him: 'I'm willing to do the sculpture for you on one condition. I want to put a very large, clear inscription on the statue, that will be visible to everyone.' 'What is the text?' he asked.

"I wrote out the inscription: 'Jacob Lipchitz, a Jew loyal to the religion of his forefathers, made this Holy Virgin for the sake of better understanding between human beings on the face of the earth, so that the spirit may prevail.' He read it, put it in his pocket, and said he would think about it. Months passed. I thought that he had decided against it. Then I got a very enthusiastic letter asking me to proceed at once.

"I worked on the statue in New York and, after a year it was nearly finished. Then a fire broke out in the studio, and the work was destroyed. It was a terrible blow to me. Many Jews wrote to me: 'You deserved it.' Others sent me money to enable me to do the work again, which I returned. I kept asking 'Why has this happened to me?' And the answer came to me: it was not enough that I, a Jew, was doing a vision for the Christians, I had to carve a vision of what Judaism meant.

"For years I drew sketches. Then I

changed them. I was carving statues in the void. I constantly made and remade sketches, without a commission, without a site, without any assurance but my own belief that some day that vision would exist in bronze.

"Then came the Six Day War and the recovery of Mount Scopus. Two or three years ago the Hadassah women came to me, and asked me whether I was prepared to carve a statue for Mount Scopus. I said that I would be delighted, provided I was allowed to do whatever I wanted. I explained my vision, and they agreed."

So his vision had found a home?

"Exactly. I see the hand of God in what happened. The history of Mount Scopus, the landscape, the way in which the site has come to the statue - certainly it must be the hand of God."

What form will the statue take? What is the theme?

"It is my interpretation of our fate. Out of Zion will come the Law."

How long will the carving take?

"Perhaps three years. Who knows? I told the Hadassah women not to bother me with dates. All I can promise is that I will give the work everything I have."

This year Mr. Lipchitz will be 80. Does he feel up to the prodigious amount of work involved in carving so huge a statue?

"Certainly it is not easy to work, high in the air. When I work I feel tired. When I don't work I feel sick. It is better to be tired."

Michelangelo, I recall, went on working harder than ever into his nineties.

"Ah, Michelangelo - he was a superman. If you want to compare me to him, I will have to live to be 200. I told the ladies of Hadassah not to worry, I would

finish the work all right."

Diffidently I wonder whether it would be possible to publish in The Jerusalem Post a copy of one of his sketches.

"Come to see me in Italy in seven or eight months' time. I should have something you can print by then."

Is he satisfied with the siting of the statue and the other arrangements?

"I came here two years ago and we picked a site, with which I was very happy. Then Mrs. Rebecca Shulman of Hadassah sent me a message: the architect, Jacob Rechter, wanted to change the site, to allow for the future development of the area, and she was not happy about his choice. I was very bothered about it, so I came again. We all met, and chose more or less the original site. Now everything is perfect. To tell you the truth, the history and the landscape 'fit in so well with what I have been dreaming for 25 years that I am a little bit afraid. I don't think I'll be able to do it all alone. But I know the Almighty will help me.'"

Will the work be abstract?

"All art is abstract. Abstraction means taking away. You will never find a work of art which is exactly like life." He has spoken of himself repeatedly as a religious Jew, yet he is a sculptor. Does he not see some contradiction?

"Certainly not. It is forbidden to imitate exactly the work of our Lord. That is what the ban against the making of graven images means. It is forbidden to worship anything other than the Lord. I agree absolutely with laws of Moses, but there have been wrong interpretations. Did not our ancestors carve the tabernacle and the Temple? I hope - I am sure - that my sculpture is kasher. I did not come out of the air. I am a Jew."

Does he see this work as the summation of his creations until now?

"Yes, you can say that this will be the crown of my work. I have a few things to finish, but the Tree of Life will dominate my whole existence for the next three or four years. The Hadassah ladies will have to pray for me."

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