The Power of Ritual Objects
92 Years of Judaica at Bezalel

When one lights that very special menorah or breathes deeply near a hand-crafted besomiah at havdalah, one releases the "power of the ritual object and [confronts] the questions it raises." Such Judaica is the "intersection of belief and art," a veritable cornucopia of meanings and esthetic delights. Such is the experience at 92 Years of Judaica at Bezalel, Continuity and Change, currently at the Yeshiva University Museum as expressed by the curator, Muli Ben Sasson.

This splendid selection of over one hundred objects of Judaica, ranges from a choice selection of objects from the Old Bezalel school that emphasizes a nationalistic art that "sought to awaken the slumbering spirit of the ancient Prophets of Israel" to contemporary Judaic artworks that are a fusion of the New Bezalel, inspired by Bauhaus internationalist design and a renewed interest in Jewish ritual objects. The question is, exactly how does this supposed power of the ritual object manifest itself and what meanings are brought forth from such simple ritual items?

Design. That was the great innovation that the New Bezalel, via the modernist Bauhaus aesthetic, contributed to the late-twentieth century appreciation of Judaica. The modernist concept of 'design' stipulates that the very shape and functionality of something, in conjunction with a heightened awareness of the materials used, can be a powerful tool to create new meaning from a functional object.

One example of this is the Torah Crown created by Arie Ofir in