

**EMAIL MESSAGE TO
A COMPETITOR IN THE PSP COMPETITION
AUGUST 2007**

This email is part of a chain of correspondence between the co-founder of PSP and a competitor in the PSP Competition. The competitor is a Polish Gentile, but is also uncommonly knowledgeable about Jewish topics. Such are his knowledge about and passion for his chosen subject that he is shortly moving to the UK to study in the Jewish Studies Department of a major UK university. Even so, as educated and curious as he is, he still has trouble with the idea that the synagogue in Poznan is irrefutably a German-Jewish synagogue, rather than a Polish-Jewish synagogue. This is a great example of why public debate is so important. Different people will often believe different things, but generally there is only one truth. For those who value finding that truth above burnishing their own vanity, the sometimes painful, even humiliating process of debate is worth the trouble. The email message begins as it does, because the competitor has previously suggested that PSP should compromise with the ZGWŻ on the plans for the future of the synagogue.

Dear XXXXXXX,

Compromise? Are you joking? Chamberlain compromised with Hitler -- the results were the *Anschluss*, the Czechoslovakian Crisis, the invasion of Poland, the Holocaust, and the rest of it. Roosevelt compromised with Stalin -- the results were nearly 50 years of isolation and Communism in Central Europe.

When something matters, and when the risk being faced is that of decades of comparative disaster, I don't see any advantage in compromise -- neither can compromise possibly lead to excellence. I made a promise in 2002 that I would do everything possible to create a "world-class" project in the Poznan synagogue, a project that would set new standards in Poznań and Poland, and that would be inspiring for all who saw it or learned of it.

For me a promise is a promise -- I don't compromise about promises. What has amazed me all along is that no one in Poznan, and very few people in Poland, have wanted a world-class project. They have wanted, instead, to make Mrs. Kobus happy. Why? Who is Mrs. Kobus that one should want to make her happy at a cost of decades of mediocrity? We should be worried about the next generation and the one after that -- not about the generation that is nearing the end of its allotted time.

Compromise would make sense if one were compromising between two or more expressions of excellence. But that is not the case here. I challenge you to provide a single example of the **ZGWŻ** being dedicated to excellence. They aren't. There is not one shred of evidence to suggest that they are. If you have such evidence, please share it with me and everyone else. I have -- and anyone else who has bothered to look also has -- evidence of corruption, of extreme vanity, of bigotry, of duplicity, of a willingness to lie, cheat, and steal. My personal experience of the ZGWŻ is that they cannot be trusted to

say what they mean, to mean what they say, or to behave decently and acceptably. I am sure this generality does not apply to every member of the ZGWŻ, and it might even surprise several members; but it does apply to the top echelon.

As a generality, it does not apply to the people at Chabad. It does not apply to Rabbi Schuman and the people at Beit Warszawa. It does not apply to the beleaguered Conservative congregation in Wrocław. In spite of years of contrary slanders and negative propaganda, it does not apply to Jakub Szadaj, to Bolesław Szenicer, or Andrzej Beryt, each of whom was forced out of the ZGWŻ and then had the audacity to found a Jewish community of his own, just as the law allows. All of them have been ostracized and effectively sidelined and silenced for making the mistake of criticizing the ZGWŻ and Rabbi Schudrich, but none of them has behaved as badly as the most senior leaders of the ZGWŻ.

Aside from their character as self-described leaders of the Jewish community, how can one compromise with people who think Stefan Bajer is an adequate architect? Adequate for what? Stefan Bajer is a below-average architect even by Polish standards (Poland has never produced a great architect in its entire history -- all the good ones were either Italians, Austrians, or Germans). The best architect Poland has at the moment is Stefan Kuryłowicz, who is very, very good. A Pritzker Prize winner? Not yet. Kuryłowicz may get there, but Stefan Bajer will never rise above the ridiculous. So why does anyone want him -- even as a compromise -- to design the renewal of the Poznań synagogue? Does someone think he has earned it? Does anyone think he deserves it? Well, then why not have an open, international architectural competition, let him enter it, and see how he does?

Have you looked at Bajer's work? I have, carefully. Grandiose houses for the nouveau riches. Office buildings with silly windows and bad proportions. Churches that look like air-raid bunkers with bell towers. One derivative work of brutalist mediocrity after another. So exactly what is it that qualifies Bajer to work on the synagogue? What can he do that any third-year architecture student from a first-class architecture school could not do much better? The synagogue deserves far better than Bajer and Kwiatkowski, especially when architects of the caliber of Moshe Safdie and Peter Eisenman have several times expressed interest in working on the project. At one time Daniel Libeskind expressed interest in it -- but then he was hired to do the Ground Zero project and he moved from Berlin to New York. The point is that world-class architects have expressed interest in the Poznań synagogue. But Mrs. Kobus and the ZGWŻ want to use their local friends and trusted allies, even though they are third-rate at best.

Has the ZGWŻ wanted the help of experts? Of course not -- Mrs. Kobus wouldn't know what to do with someone who actually knew how to do his job properly and to a world-class standard. She knows that anyone competent would ask her to sit down, be quiet, and let him get on with his job -- and she couldn't stand that for one second. For her, it's not about the synagogue, and it's certainly not about excellence, it's about seeing her photo in the paper as one of the great and the good of Poznań. I've no doubt she expects the finished product to be named the "*Alicja Kobus Center for Dialogue between*

Christians and Jews.” Beware people who build their own memorials. To quote a very wise Jew on the subject, “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.” (*Ecclesiastes* 1:2)

Why would anyone settle for crap when someone is prepared to provide caviar?

Mr. Bajer has no business designing even a doorway for the synagogue. I wrote to him pointing that out -- in case he wasn't already aware of it or had forgotten his true standing in the hierarchy of architects. I pointed out to him that some of the world's truly great architects (such as Safdie, Eisenman, Foster, Rogers, Herzog & deMeuron, Cox, Hecker, etc.), as well as some of the world's best-known architectural and art critics (Krinsky, Goldberger, Hammer-Schenk, Yentob, Gruber, etc.) are watching. They will not say or write nice things about him if he produces nothing better than what he has so far produced. First, because his work isn't any good. Second, because he was not chosen through an open international architectural competition based on achieving excellence. Third, because the ZGWZ has dubious moral standing in this matter -- they have claimed and accepted a synagogue without including its rightful owners in any part of the process. Morally, who can argue that the rightful owners are not the Jews of Germany? But the ZGWZ refuses even to acknowledge the possibility..

If Bajer thinks he will live long enough to see his so-called design come into being, I am willing to wager against him. There is no way that his unconsidered, shallow, banal, insulting design will be built. My advice to Bajer remains today exactly as it was on the day I first saw his proposal -- the best thing he can do for the synagogue is to resign from his involvement and withdraw his plans immediately. That way, a world-class architect can be selected to come in and do the job properly.

If Bajer wants to fight it out in public, that's fine -- but I am committed to seeing an excellent design in place. Sadly, Bajer and Kwiatkowski haven't a chance of delivering one. They are grade C architects -- and they do not deserve to work on this project. If you doubt my estimation of their worth, then go to someone who can be trusted to express an informed and honest opinion -- Prof. Jan Skuratowicz, for example -- and ask him.

Of course, this is only the view of a highly educated, very worldly, and rather well-connected, but also highly opinionated person who has been working on this project since 2001 and has never once seen or heard anything good come from the mind or the mouth of Alicja Kobus. She consistently chooses to bring things down to her level rather than to aim for the stars. That is why she has chosen Bajer and Kwiatkowski.

PSP's position is that only the winner of a properly conducted international competition should be invited to work on the synagogue. Bajer and Kwiatkowski shouldn't get it because they are not capable of doing a world-class job -- but, of course, they should be allowed to enter any competition that is held. But there is no need to listen to me on the subject: put together a proper competition and let competent judges decide. If the

competition is done properly, and if there is no corruption involved, then the results will speak for themselves.

Do you want crap? Or do you want caviar? If you want caviar, then don't settle for crap. Not even to make an egomaniacal old woman happy. However, you will have to fight hard for caviar, because everyone around you appears to be happy to settle for crap. Most of them have never tasted caviar, which isn't their fault, but it is true nonetheless. If you've never had caviar, and instead have lived your whole life on crap, then naturally you will prefer crap. But it will still be crap.

It's worth the fight for caviar -- because the next generation will have better examples to follow. And that matters.

You still haven't said why you think Bajer and Kwiatkowski are the right ones for the job? Do you really think they are the best available -- or are you just defending them because you think I am being cruel to them and you don't want to see their feelings being hurt?

Over to you,
Andrew