

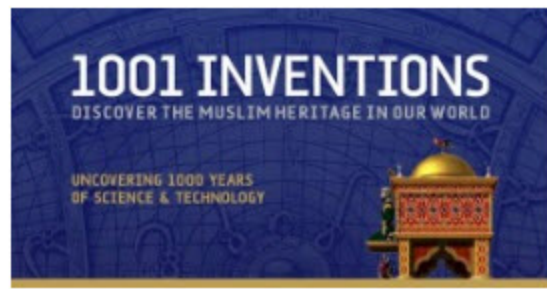
Pacific Jewish Center | Rabbi

The Rabbi on the Beach at the Shul on the Beach



1001 Inventions Exhibit at the California Science Center

by RABBIFINK on JANUARY 9, 2012 · 0 COMMENTS



We did a family trip to the California Science Center at Exposition Park in Los Angeles yesterday. The museum is nice, albeit a bit outdated. Such is the fate of any museum that has exhibits of the latest and greatest in technology. Cell phones were a new obscure invention according to the exhibit on technology. Even better was the section describing how phone lines are not fast enough for video conferencing. Hehe.

Anyway, the highlights of the museum are the Hubble 3D IMAX movie and the temporary exhibit called 1001 Inventions. The IMAX was incredible. It told the story of the Hubble telescope and some of its most incredible discoveries. It was really powerful to see the beauty and seeming infinite scope of outer space. The 3D images of galaxies and galaxy clusters trillions of light years away is awe-inspiring. The 3D glasses, 9 story screen and excellent sound system make you feel like you are traveling through space. Simply remarkable.

1001 Inventions is an international project that demonstrates some of the technological marvels and advances contributed by the Arab world in the Middle Ages. In a time that is stereotyped as the Dark Ages in Europe, much "light" was found in Arab countries. Hundreds of ideas and inventions are part of the exhibit. It is modern and compelling and I really enjoyed it.

Socially, the exhibit attracted many Muslims and I found pleasure and inspiration exploring the exhibit side by side with devout Muslims.

Politically, I can anticipate that there are those who will object to the exhibit simply because it portrays Islam in a favorable light. It has become en vogue for social conservatives and progressives to battle over the imagery of Islam in America. Some people find it harmful that Islam be portrayed as peaceful or beneficial to society. Others bend over backwards to ignore Islamic extremism and oppression in Arab countries. I don't think either of those approaches are wise or prudent, but that is neither here nor there.

When examining the exhibit through those lenses I think the exhibit was fair. It only spoke to technology and medicine and the scholarship within the Arab world during the Middle Ages. I think this is an message for Arabs and non-Arabs in 2012. It is important for non-Arabs because it reminds them (or informs them) that there is a rich history of wisdom and forward thinking in the Arab world. We need to be thankful for their contributions to society. It is important for Arabs because in its current iteration, it seems as though the Arab community is mired in backwards thinking. Technology and progress are not priorities. Thinking and scholarship are not priorities either. Advances are not coming from the Arab world at the same rate as they come from Asia, Europe or America. It would be great if this exhibit inspired a return to scholarship and innovation that contributes to the good of the world community. With such a rich history, I would imagine reinvigorating efforts for progress would be natural.

The second take-away from the exhibit that I had was that it tried to show that relations between members of different religions were not always contentious. The best proof of this was the only non-Muslim or Arab with a prominent place in the exhibit. That would be the Maimonides display:



I found the description of Maimonides fair and positive. It might be a bit understated though. I think Maimonides was even more of an iconoclast than he is given credit for in the panel. A video accompanied this panel and went a bit more in depth than the panel. In general, I was very pleased that Maimonides was included in the exhibit.

I am sure that some will find nefarious intentions in his inclusions. Something along the lines of the "Muslims are stealing Maimonides" or something like that. But I think that is misguided and wrong. The text clearly says that he was a Jewish doctor. Most importantly, the text notes that he helped people of all faiths. Indeed, this is one of the legacies of Maimonides.

The exhibit is worth seeing if you are in LA or one of the other locations. If you have seen it, I am interested in your impressions of the exhibit.

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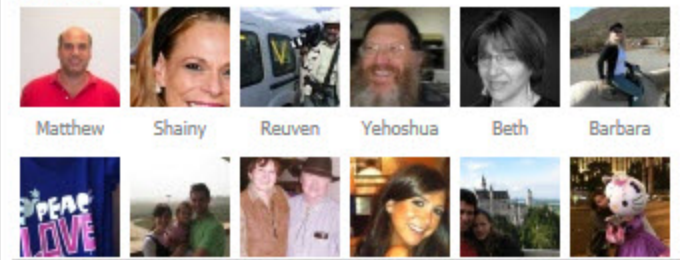
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