

PARSHAT MISHPATIM
EXODUS 21:1-24:18
HAFTARAH II KINGS 12:1-17
25 SIVAN 5783/16 FEBRUARY 2023



Dominant Curve
Oil on canvass by Wassily Kandinsky

BACK DOWN (OR IS IT UP?) TO EARTH

1. God spoke all these words, saying: “I Adonai am your God...You shall not make...You shall not swear falsely...Remember the sabbath...Honor your father and mother... (Exodus 20:1-12)

Moses took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, “All that God has said we shall do and we shall hear”...Then God said, “Come up to Me on the mountain...” (Exodus 24:1-12)

(Rashi) This passage [Exodus 24:1-12] was said before the Ten Commandments.

2. How can the moment of arrival in the wilderness, a moment before Torah was given, serve as a paradigm of the eternal freshness of the words of Torah? Before the process of Revelation begins, there is a spontaneous understanding that their relation to law has been inadequate. There is a resolve to imbue old forms with new meanings, as the expression of God’s will. They realize they have done nothing, for all was habit and convention. (Maor VaShemesh)

3. The new era dawns, therefore, before the Torah is given. The Torah comes to answer a human readiness for a revisioning of culture...God as transformative Presence comes, commanding from outside. But the desire for Him comes from within human consciousness. (Avivah Zornberg, *The Particulars of Rapture*)

4. ...all the people answered with one voice, saying “all the words that God has spoken we will do!” Moses then wrote down all the words of God. (Exodus 24:3-4)

Then Moses took the record of the covenant and read it aloud to the people. And they said, “All that God has spoken we shall do and we shall hear!” (Exodus 24:7)

5. “Do not ascend the heights of My altar that your (shameful) nakedness may not be exposed on it.” (concluding verse Parshat Yirto)

“These are the rules (*mishpatim*) that you shall set before them: If you acquire a slave...one who fatally strikes a person...when people fight...when an ox gores...when a person creates an open pit...when a person lets their livestock loose...one whose fire destroyed another’s grain...when one lends something to another...when one borrows an animal... (opening of Parshat Mishpatim through 22:13)

6. Because the image lacks any indication of depth, your brain can interpret it in two ways: either a staircase going up from the ground, or a staircase coming down from the ceiling. In the 2020 winning illusion, a small cone placed at the apparent “top” of the staircase can reach the bottom without taking a single step. The staircase just has to be spun 180 degrees.... When Sugihara shows the illusion from new perspectives, he reveals that the “staircase” is actually a horizontal platform—its legs are the same height. (Smithsonian Magazine, 01/05/21)