

PARSHAT MISHPATIM
29 SHIVAT 5781/11 FEBRUARY 2021



Layers of Creation

Oil on canvass by Ruth Feldman

“I paint not what I see, but rather what I don’t see.... I think of my paintings as metaphor - new layers of meaning, inspired or evoked by the words of classical Jewish texts....I am attempting...to offer a visual response, a new medium for metaphor to get at other dimensions of meaning concealed within the words.”

TO IMBUE OLD FORMS WITH NEW MEANING

1. “And to Moses God said...” (Exodus 24:1). This passage was said before the Ten Utterances. On the fourth of Sivan, he was told “Come up to God.” (Rashi)
2. “Moses came and told the people all the words of God and all the laws” (24:3). “All the laws” refers to the seven Noachide laws and others that were given to them at Marah (15:25). (Rashi)
3. “And Moses wrote all the words of God” (24:4). Moses wrote from Creation to the giving of Torah. He also wrote down the commandments they were given at Marah. (Rashi)
4. 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

5. “All that God has spoken we shall do and we shall hear!” (Exodus 24:7)
6. *Na'aseh* – “We shall do” – refers to the revealed – that is, to the commandments that one can fulfill, on one’s own level. *Nishama* – “We shall hear” – refers to the hidden – that is, to things that one cannot grasp. For around each commandment, there are other things, which belong to the class of the hidden. (Rabbi Nachman of Bratslov)
7. Rabbi Yochanan said: Anyone who makes true meaning of Torah, it is as though he made himself – as it is said, “God commanded me at that time to teach you the statutes and laws, to do them (la’asot chem otam)” [Deuteronomy 4:14]. It does not say la’asot otam (“to do them”) but la’asot chem atem (“to make yourselves”). From here we learn that it is as though he made and created himself. (Midrash Tanchuma Ki Tavo)