

PARSHAT VAYESHEV
24 KISLEV 5781/10 DECEMBER 2020



Ladder

Ink and water on paper by Amie Oliver

Ladders surfaced in the work I made there [in Tibet in 2009]... a reference to the Tibetans' desire to escape oppression and/or attain enlightenment. Since then the ladders have become a running motif for me at times, particularly personal and relevant when I lost my parents in 2011. As my sleep patterns are so out of whack right now, I dream about these images and have realized my ladders walk the line between a DNA sequence and Jacob's Ladder....This series will continue to evolve. What began as part of my "Dharma Diaries" in 2009 currently reflects the anxiety of an unknown unlike any other in our lifetime. I'm okay with the unknown part. Nature and science rock. It's the Idiocracy that scares me.

PAINTING THROUGH A PANDEMIC: THE WAY OF LADDERS

1. "And Jacob settled" (Genesis 37:1). Jacob sought to dwell in tranquility. But then the *rogez* of Joseph sprung upon him [קִפְצָה עָלָיו רָגֵזוֹ שֶׁל יוֹסֵף]. The righteous seek to dwell in tranquility. But the Holy Blessed One said, "The righteous do not consider that which is prepared for them in the world to come to be enough for them; they seek to dwell in tranquility in this world as well!" (Rashi at 37:2)

רָגַז - be agitated, perturbed; רָגֵזוֹ - agitation

2. "Jacob settled in the land of Canaan, in the land of his father's sojournings [*megurei aviv*]." (37:1) He settled in the land of his father's fear [*megurei aviv*] and in the land of Canaan, of humility [*kana*] - and he sought to dwell in peace. This peace obtains when a person behaves in such a way as to keep far from all doubt, and guards himself from any evil act. That is the modality of peace. But in response to Jacob's desire for such peace, God told

him that as long as a human being lives in a bodily experience, it is impossible to behave with extreme wariness and fear and humility. For God wants human acts, and in this world human beings must act in love, in ways that are not completely clarified. (Ishbitzer, Mei HaShiloach)

גור - to sojourn; גַּר - sojourner

גור - to stir up strife; מְגוֹר - fear, terror

3. The Ishbitzer suggests an eternal oscillation between extremes of fear and love, certainty and courage, in the face of perplexity. A worldview based on fear and humility...risks human atrophy; for such fear and humility grant all power to God. Only a vision in which the plot is unclear, in which anomalies bewilder serene faith and integrities are torn apart, can open the possibility of human action. Cognitively, action means the capacity to reintegrate the fragments of experience into new wholes: in re-membering, to create something unprecedented, a personal language of self-description. (Avivah Zornberg, *The Beginnings of Desire*)
4. “Your offspring shall be strangers in a land not theirs.” (Genesis 15:13)
5. It is possible to be in a plot and not understand it. (Thomas Mann, *Joseph and His Brothers*)