

PARSHAT MISHPATIM
EXODUS 21:1-24:18
HAFTARAH JEREMIAH 34:8-22, 33:25-26
22 SH'VAT 5785/20 FEBRUARY 2025



The Waters of Abuhav
Painting by Ruth Feldman

BEGINNER'S MIND

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)
2. 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)

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

3. 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)
4. The artist is no other than he who unknowns what he has learned, in order to know himself. (e. e. cummings)

5. When I paint, I “begin without beginning.” Another way to say it is to “begin without knowing.” This approach is opposite of the advice to “begin with the end in mind,” or to know where you’re going before you start. “Shoshin” is a word from Zen Buddhism meaning “beginner’s mind.” It means having an attitude of openness, eagerness, and lack of preconception....Paint what you see, not what you think you know. (Tracy Everly)
6. “We shall do and we shall hear.” (Exodus 24:7)

God’s angels, who are mighty of strength, who do God’s word, to hear the voice of God’s word. (Psalm 103:20)

They do before hearing. It is a secret of angels. “We shall do and we shall hear,” which seems to us contrary to logic, is the order of angelic existence. This shocks logic and can pass for blind faith or the naivete of childish trust; yet it is what underlies any inspired act, even artistic, for the act only brings out the form in which it only now recognizes its model, never glimpsed before. (Emmanuel Levinas)

7. 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*)