

PARSHAT VAYESHEV  
GENESIS 37:1-40:23  
HAFTARAH AMOS 2:6-3:8  
21 KISLEV 5786/11 DECEMBER 2025



*Fourth Seal*  
Julie Mehretu

## ACTS OF LOVE

1. *Eleh toldot Esav* (“This is the line of Esau”). (Genesis 36:1)  
*Eleh toldot Yaakov* (“This is the line of Jacob”). (Genesis 37:2)
2. “Esau went to a land” (Genesis 36:6). To live wherever he could, because of the writ of obligation “your offspring shall be sojourners in a land not theirs” (Genesis 15:13), about which Esau said, “Let me go away from here; I will have no part of paying that obligation, which was placed on the seed of Isaac.” (Rashi)
3. “Jacob was settled” (Genesis 37:1). Esau’s line settled in land that they took hold of as an everlasting possession. But Jacob lived as a sojourner in a land not theirs but Canaan’s. This means they chose to live as sojourners in the chosen land, and that “your offspring shall be sojourners in a land not theirs” was fulfilled in them not in Esau. (Ramban)

4. “Jacob settled in the land of Canaan, in the land of his father’s sojournings.” (37:1) He settled 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... (Ishbitzer, Mei HaShiloach)
5. 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-membling, to create something unprecedented, a personal language of self-description. (Avivah Zornberg, *The Beginnings of Desire*)
6. Several things dovetailed in my mind & at once it struck me, what quality went to form a Man of Achievement especially in Literature & which Shakespeare possessed so enormously – I mean Negative Capability, that is when man is capable of being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact & reason... (John Keats, letter to his brothers George and Thomas, 1817).
7. Being a scientist requires having faith in uncertainty, finding pleasure in mystery, and learning to cultivate doubt. There is no surer way to screw up an experiment than to be certain of its outcome. (Stuart Firestein, *Ignorance: How It Drives Science*)
8. Art’s job is to complicate as much as possible. That’s what we want art for; that’s what we want poetry for – to be full of contradictions, or to expose contradictions. That’s where radical possibility exists. Imagining other possibilities in how things change. (Julie Mehretu)
9. ...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)
10. Love is not a guarantee of a specific outcome. It is a journey of shared effort and personal growth. A covenantal relationship.