

PARSHAT MISHPATIM
EXODUS 21:1-24:18
HAFTARAH II KINGS 12:1-17
25 SH'VAT 5786/12 FEBRUARY 2026



Painting by Tracy Everly

TO BEGIN WITHOUT BEGINNING

1. 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 Utterances. (Rashi)

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. 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)
5. I have never started a poem yet whose end I knew. Writing a poem is discovering. (Robert Frost)

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

6. “...you will not covet.” (conclusion to *Aseret Hadibrot*)

“You will make no covenant with them and their gods. They will not remain in your land, lest [turning to face them] they would cause you to sin against Me; because you would serve their gods, and it would be to you a snare [שֶׁקֶר - to lay a bait or lure].” (conclusion to Exodus chapter 23, recitation of *mishpatim*)