



SoulSpa 3.18 • P. Mishpatim
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ברוך אתה יהוה
אלהינו מלך העולם
אשר קדשנו במצותיו
וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה:

Barukh Atah Adonai
eloheinu melekh ha'olam
asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav
v'tzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, YHVH, our God,
eternal sovereign, who sanctified us
in God's *mitzvot* and commanded us
to busy ourselves in words of Torah.

MORALITY DOES NOT COME FROM LAW: IT COMES FROM SOMETHING PRE-LAW

53 mitzvot out of 613

indentured servitude... criminal law... civil law... loans...
treatment of strangers... mixing milk and meat... prayer...

**** Theory of commandedness: God as commander / law as manifestation of transcendent experience / relationship ****

Does God have visiting hours?
IS LANGUAGE FAILING US?

Exodus 24:1-11

(We're still at Sinai.)

ואל-משה אמר עלה אל-יהוה
אתה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא ושבעים
מזקני ישראל והשתחויתם מרחק:
ונגש משה לבדו אל-יהוה והם
לא יגשו והעם לא יעלו עמו:

1-2. And to Moshe [God] said, "Ascend to YHVH – you, Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy from Israel's elders – and bow from afar. Moshe will approach YHVH alone: others will not approach, and the nation will not ascend with him."
physical ascent?? spiritual ascent? something else?

since when
do we agree
on anything?

ויבא משה ויספר לעם את כל-
דברי יהוה ואת כל-המשפטים
ויען כל-העם קול אחד ויאמרו
כל-הדברים אשר-דבר יהוה
נעשה: ויכתב משה את כל-דברי
יהוה וישכם בבקר ויבן מזבח
תחת ההר ושתים עשרה מצבה
לשנים עשר שבטי ישראל:

3-4. Moshe went and told the nation all of YHVH's words and all of God's rules; and all the nation answered with one voice, saying, "All the things that YHVH said, we will do!"
Moshe wrote down all YHVH's commands. He woke in the morning, built an altar at the base of the mountain, with twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel.
communal representation?
permanence in a temporary world?
offerings as quasi-Egyptian? foreign?
who? huh?

וישלח את-נערי בני ישראל ויעלו
עלת ויזבחו זבחים שלמים
ליהוה פרים: ויטח משה חצי
הדם וישם באגנות וחצי הדם זרק
על-המזבח:

5-6. He sent boys of the Children of Israel to raise up offerings, and they made cow *sh'lamim* offerings to YHVH. Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar.

what is this?

ויטח ספר הברית ויקרא באזני
העם ויאמרו כל אשר-דבר יהוה
נעשה ונשמע: ויטח משה את-הדם
ויזרק על-העם ויאמר הנה דם-
הברית אשר כרת יהוה עמכם על-
כל-הדברים האלה:

7-8. He took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the ears of the nation, and they said, "All the things that YHVH said, we will do and we will hear." Moshe took the blood and sprinkled it on the nation saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that YHVH now cuts with you concerning all these things."
visceral life-force

HUH?
Do, then
intrinsic
become
learn?
... or,
slave mentality
of doing what
we're told?

ויעל משה ואהרן נדב ואביהוא
ושבעים מזקני ישראל: ויראו את
אלהי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה
לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים
לטהר:

9-10. Moshe and Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended. They saw the God of Israel and under His feet was like the making of brickwork of sapphire, like the very essence of sky for purity.
Wait, what?

ואל-אצילי בני ישראל לא שלחו
ידו ויחזו את-האלהים ויאכלו
וישתו:

11. And against the leaders of the Children of Israel, [God] did not raise a hand: they gazed at God, and they ate and drank.

prophetic vision —> feed our "eyes" ?

DO FIRST, HEAR LATER

Sforno, Ex. 24:7

נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע. נַעֲשֶׂה לְתַכְלִית
שְׁנִשְׁמָע בְּקוֹלוֹ כְּעַבְדִּים הַמְשַׁמְשִׁים
אֶת הָרֵב שְׁלֵא עַל דְּרֹד לְקַבֵּל פְּרָס.

We will do and we will hear – “We will do” first by taking in [God’s] voice like servants serving their master, not expecting to receive a reward. either slave mentality... or out of goodness of heart (i.e. do things from LOVE, not fear or for benefit)

Rashbam, Ex. 24:7

נעשה ונשמע - נעשה מה שדיבר
וגם נשמע מה שיצונו עוד מכאן
ולהבא ונקיים.

We will do and we will hear – “We will do” what God said already; “we will hear” what God will command from here.
temporal: this, then that - i.e. revelation continues

Steinsaltz, Ex. 24:7

In addition to their expressed agreement to obey what God had already commanded, they now declared their commitment to obey God’s future instructions. This commitment included not only the actual fulfillment of God’s commands in practice but also their internal acceptance of God’s will. external action → internal acceptance/becoming

Avivah Zornberg, Ex. 24:7

covenant = something more than promise. It’s a relationship of identity = KETUBAH

This covenant is not the ‘ratification’ of a treaty whose terms are spelled out in some detail, but a commitment to something beyond obedience.

Kehot Humash, Ex. 24:7

By saying “we will do” before “we will hear” they [implied] that they were prepared to fulfill God’s will unconditionally – even before they knew what it was. When the ministering angels heard this, they descended from heaven and placed two ethereal crowns, woven out of the splendor of God’s presence, on the head of each Jew: one for “we will do” and one for “we will hear.” ... ergo treat others that way!
... ergo see that in everyone, reflecting back at us.

R. Nahman of Breslov, Likkutei Moharan 22:9:3

נַעֲשֶׂה וְנִשְׁמָע הוּא בְּחִינַת נִסְתָּרוֹת
וְנִגְלוֹת: נַעֲשֶׂה הוּא בְּחִינַת נִגְלוֹת,
הֵינּוּ הַמְצוּוֹת שְׂאֵפֶשֶׁר לְכָל אָחָד
לְקַיֵּם לְפִי מִדְּרָגָתוֹ, וְנִשְׁמָע הִיא
בְּחִינַת נִסְתָּרוֹת, מֵה שֶׁהוּא גְבוּהַ
וְנִסְתָּר מִפָּנָיו.

We will do and we will hear corresponds to hidden and revealed. “We will do” evokes the revealed – precepts that each and every person can fulfill commensurate with one’s level. “We will hear” evokes the hidden – that which is elevated and hidden from us.

R. Jonathan Sacks, Ex. 24:7

[It] means, “We will do and we will understand.” From this [our ancestors] derive[d] the conclusion that we can only understand Judaism by doing it, by performing the commands and living a Jewish life. In the beginning is the deed. Only then comes the grasp, the insight, the comprehension.... **The only way to understand a way of life is to take the risk of living it.** So: *na’aseh v’nishnah*, “We will do and eventually, through extended practice and long exposure, we will understand.”

LIKE THE MAKING OF BRICKWORK OF SAPPHIRE

Rashi, Ex. 24:10

divinity uses suffering to call us

כמעשה לבנת הספיר. היא היתה
לפניו בשעת השעבוד, לזכר צרתו
של ישראל שהיו משעבדים במעשה
לבנים:

Like the making of brickwork of sapphire – This came to God during the time of subjugation, to memorialize the woe of Israel by which they were subjugated in making bricks.

Hizkuni, Ex. 24:10

redemptive? communitarian: lifeless>>life
suffering → healing?

אמר ר' עקיבא עבדי פרעה היו
דוחקין ומכין את ישראל כדי
לעשות להם תוכן לבנים בכפל שני
תוכן לבנים תתנו והמצרים לא היו
נותנים להם תבן והיו צריכים
לקושש קש במדבר ואותו קש היה
מלא קוצים וברקנים והיה הקש
נוקב את עקביהם והיה הדם
מתבוסס ומתערב בטיט, ורחל בת
בנו של מתושלח היתה הרה ללדת
ורומסת בטיט עם בעלה עד שיצא
הולד ממעיה ונתערב עם המלבן
והיתה צועקת על בנה ועלתה
צעקתה לפני כסא הכבוד וירד
מיכאל ונטלהו והעלהו לפני כסא
הכבוד ועשה אותו מלבן ונתנו
למטה מרגליו של הקב"ה, הוא
שנאמר ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת
הספיר. פירוש לבנה שנעשית
משפיר היולדת.

R. Akiva said, Pharaoh's servants forced Israel to prepare a double set of bricks, and refused to supply them straw to reinforce them, so they had to forage in the fields. They gathered straw full of thorns and thistles, which pierced the skin of their feet, blood from their wounds mixing with the clay. A pregnant Rachel, daughter of Metushelah's son, was trampling clay with her husband, bloodied all over, until she miscarried on the birthing stool (מלבן): the fetus emerged and mixed into the clay [underfoot]. She wailed for her son: her cry ascended to the throne of glory. [The archangel] Michael descended, took him, brought him before the throne of glory, turned him into a brick (לבנה), and placed him under the "feet" of the Holy Blessed One, as in "And under His feet was like the making of brickwork of sapphire." Meaning: a brick [of sapphire (Heb. *sapir*) was made from the placenta (Heb. *shapir*) of the birthing woman. THIS SPIRITUALITY IS NOT BLIND TO SUFFERING, OR SEPARATE FROM IT

Sforno, Ex. 24:10

כמעשה לבנת הספיר. עץם נעדר
כל הצורות השכליות ומוכן
לקבלם, כמו הספיר הלבן הנעדר
מכל המראות. והוא עץם הנפש
האנושית השכלית, הנעדרת מכל
מדע ומוכנת לקבלם בעיון בחירוי.

Like the making of brickwork of sapphire – An essence, transparent, devoid of all colors and permanent contour, so it is almost completely abstract, capable of receiving them, like the human soul's white sapphire in [the level] of wisdom, transparent to all knowledge and ready to receive them – in my opinion.

Ezekiel 1 >> Ezekiel 1:22-23, 26

ידמות על-ראשי הסיה רקיע כעין
הקרח הנורא נטוי על-ראשיהם
מלמעלה: ותחת הרקיע כנפיהם
ישרות אשה אל-אחותה לאיש
שפתים מכסות להנה ולאיש שפתים
מכסות להנה את גויתיהם: ...
ויממעל לרקיע אשר על-ראשם
כמראה אבן-ספיר דמות כסא ועל
דמות הכסא דמות כמראה אדם
עליו מלמעלה:

And the image above the heads of the creatures was an expanse, like an awesome eye of ice spread over their heads. Under the expanse, each had a pair of wings extended toward the others, and each had another pair covering its body.... And above the expanse over their heads was like the appearance of a sapphire stone [as] an image of a throne, and on the image of the throne was an image like the appearance of a person on it from above.

Ibn Ezra, Ex. 24:10

וטעם וכעצם השמים לטוהר, תחת לבנת הספיר והוא הרקיע שהוא כעין הקרח שהוא נטוי על ראשי החיות שראה יחזקאל והנה כתוב ויראו את אלהי ישראל, ושם כתוב היא החיה אשר ראיתי תחת אלהי ישראל כי תפס דרך קצרה, כי היא תחת רקיע, גם הוא תחת הכסא והכל תחת השם הנכבד:

The reason for *and like the essence of sky for purity* under the brickwork of **sapphire** was the expanse [itself], like the ice of the firmament stretched over the heads of the animals Ezekiel saw (Ezek. 1:22). Here it is written (Ex. 24:10), "They saw the God of Israel," and there it is written (Ezek. 10:20), "This is the animal I saw under the God of Israel." This is mere brevity: the [animal] was under the firmament, which was under the throne, all under the God of Glory.

Sefer HaBahir 96

כסאו של הקב"ה, והוא אבן יקרה, והוא ים החכמה וכנגדה תלכת בציצית, דאמר ר' מאיר מה נשתנה תלכת מכל מיני צבעונין? מפני שהתלכת דומה לים וים דומה לרקיע ורקיע דומה לכסא הכבוד שנאמר ויראו את אלהי ישראל ותחת רגליו כמעשה לבנת הספיר וכעצם השמים לטהר, ואומר כמראה אבן הספיר דמות כסא.

The throne of the Holy Blessed One is precious stone like the sea of *hokhmah* [=wisdom] corresponding to *t'kheilet* of *tzitzit*. As R. Meir said: How is *t'kheilet* different from all other colors? *T'kheilet* resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the firmament, and the firmament resembles the throne of glory – as it is said (Ex. 24:10), "They saw the God of Israel and under His feet was like the making of brickwork of **sapphire**, like the essence of sky in purity," and it is said (Ezek. 1:26), "Like the appearance of **sapphire** stone resembling a throne."

Rabbeinu Bahya, Ex. 24:10

ויראו את אלהי ישראל. הכוונה בזה על הכבוד האחרון שהזכירו למעלה ולכך הוסיף בו את שהוא השכינה שה' המיוחד שהוא אלהי ישראל כתוב בו כי לא יראני האדם וחי והוא הכבוד שראה יחזקאל כמראה אדם עליו מלמעלה

They saw the God of Israel – This refers to the *kavod* that, we previously noted, is another name for *Shekhinah*. We know it is impossible to experience a direct vision of the attribute of God: God specifically told Moshe that no one can see God and live (Ex. 33:20). This is the same *kavod* which the prophet Ezekiel beheld in a vision (Ezek. 1:26) as an "appearance" of a human being above the animals.

R. Jessica Kate Meyer, "New Perspective, New Lens"

A lot of people have lost a lot of sleep figuring out how to translate *livnat hasapir*. ^{= brickwork of sapphire}
Twelfth century commentator Ibn Ezra imagines it as a sculpted sapphire looking glass, a prism through which all present see deeply, and experience prophecy.... I imagine our 70 elders, and Aaron and Moshe, perhaps they too look up, lean their heads back, and through the sapphire-tinted prism of *livnat hasapir*, an *aspaklaria* [=speculum], glimpse further, with more depth, what they couldn't see with their naked eye.

In our tradition, the *aspaklaria* is the lens through which we perceive Divine Presence, through which we filter holiness in the world around us. According to [Talmud], a select few see this world through an *aspaklaria meira*, an **illuminated** lens, while most of us peer through a glass **darkly**, carrying an unlit lens, through which we perceive very little on the other side.

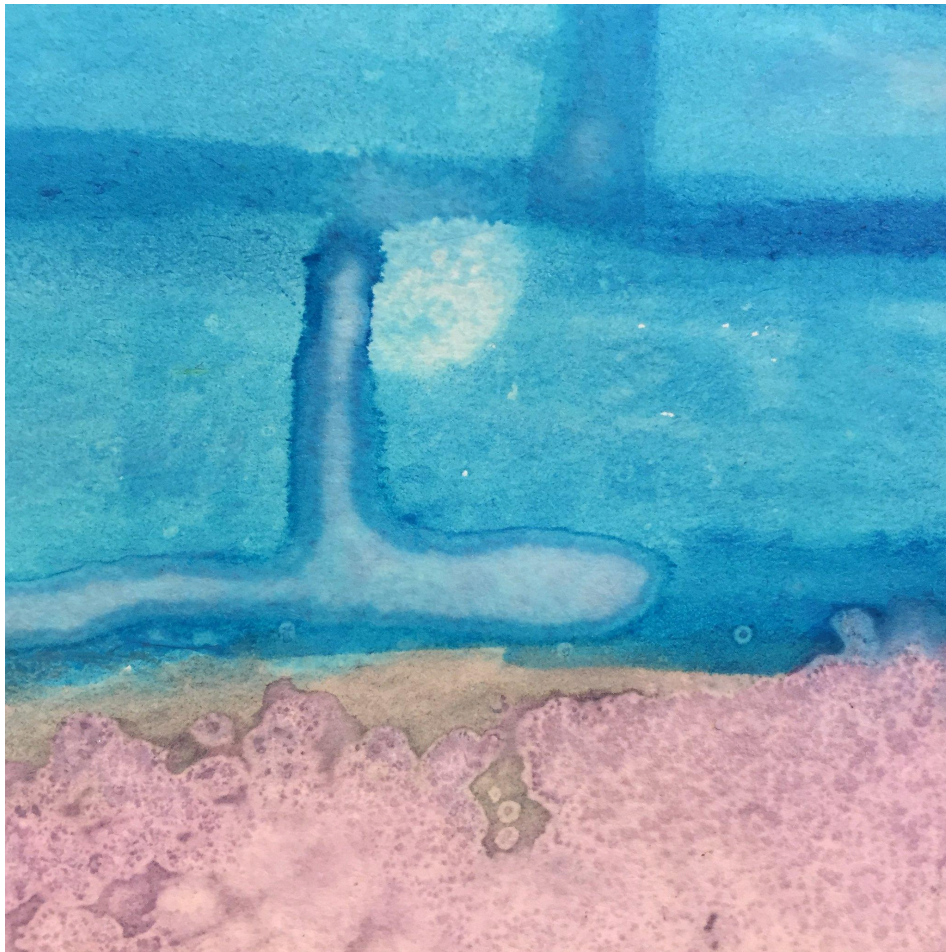
What lens are you carrying right now? Is it lit from within? Does it magnify depth and texture, the *kadosh*-ness, holiness of the world around you?...

As we go out on this Shabbat Mishpatim, I bless us to carry two props in our hands, borrowed from *livnat hasapir*: a bright clear lens, with which to perceive depth, texture, holiness; and a transmutable brick, to remind us to turn mud and straw into sapphire.

BONUS MATERIALS

📺 Livnat Hasapir - לבנת הספיר - a setting of Ex. 24:10 by Nava Tehila

R. Pamela Gottfriend, Livnat HaSapir



PICNIC WITH GOD

Ibn Ezra, Ex. 24:11

וישתו בשמחה, ורי יהודה הלוי אמר, כי טעם ויאכלו, כי הוצרכו שיאכלו, אעפ"י שנהנו מזיו השכינה, והזכיר זה בעבור משה שחיה ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה בלא אכילה ככתוב בפרשה אחרי זאת:

And drank. In happiness. R. Yehudah HaLevi says that the meaning of *and ate* is, they had to eat even though they enjoyed the splendor of the Shekhinah. Scripture mentions this because Moshe lived for forty days and forty nights without eating and drinking, as is noted in the next parsha.

Hizkuni, Ex. 24:11

ויאכלו וישתו כדרך כורת ברית שירדו שמחים מן ההר ואכלו זבחי שלמים שזבחו נעריהם ולכבודו של משה נכתב מקרא זה שהם הוצרכו לאכול ולשתות אעפ"י שנהנו מזיו שכינה ומשה היה שם ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה בלא אכילה ושתיה כמו שפירש לאלתר.

They ate and drank. In the manner of those who cut a covenant and came joyously down from the mountain, who ate the *sh'lamin* offerings that their youths had offered up. This verse is here to honor Moshe, who did not need to eat and drink while experiencing visions, because he received [flow] from Shekhinah over the course of 40 days and nights without eating or drinking, as has been explained.

Rabbeinu Bahya, Ex. 24:11

ורש"י פי' ויחזו את האלהים ויאכלו וישתו כי בעוד שהיו אוכלים ושותים היו מסתכלים אותו בלב גס.

Rashi reads the words *they gazed upon God and ate and drank* together, meaning that the two occurred simultaneously, that they acted with coarse heart.

וע"ד המדרש ויאכלו וישתו וכי קילור עלה עמהם לסיני כן דרשו בויקרא רבה פרשת אחרי מות. פירוש קילור עוגה, אלא ויאכלו וישתו אמר רבי יוחנן אכילה ודאית שנאמר (משלי ט"ז:ט"ו) באור פני מלך חיים, ובאור זה כי מזון הנפש ועדונה באותה המראה הנפלאה יכנה הכתוב לאכילה ושתיה שהוא עדון הגוף, וכן אמר דוד ע"ה (תהילים ס"ג:ו') כמו חלב ודשן תשבע נפשי, כי כיון שהגוף מתקיים מן המזון הגופני הבא מסבה אחר סבה עאכ"ו שתתקיים הנפש בהתקשרה בסבה העליונה ראשונה יתברך והוא המזון האמתי הקיים והאכילה הודאית הנצחית וכענין שכתוב (שם לו) ירוין מדשן ביתך ונחל עדניך תשקם

A Midrashic approach to *they ate and drank* (Vayikra Rabbah 20:10 on Acharei Mot): "Did they take cake along to Mount Sinai?" R. Yochanan understands this via Proverbs 16:15: "in the light of the King's face there is life." The vision they experienced sustained them as if they had been refreshed by food and drink. The meaning of Solomon's words is that the true food that sustains life is "God's favor," which Solomon describes as "like the rain in the spring." According to this view the entire vision may be compared to food and drink of a superior category. This was the true nutriment. It may also be compared to what David had in mind in Psalms 63:6 when he said: "I am sated as with a rich feast." We have to contrast physical food which though it sustains the body reaches us at arm's length, so to speak. God has to employ a number of "transformers" in order for physical food to reach us. Receiving Divine inspiration directly is a much more efficient process, skips the intermediaries, and therefore is likely to achieve more with less. This thought may be reflected in Psalms 36:9-10: "they feast on the rich fare of Your House; You let them drink at Your refreshing stream."