

Looking under God's feet

This week's Torah portion, Mishpatim, takes us down the legal rabbit hole which is the covenant between Am Israel and God. After the wonderful mystical experience of receiving Torah we now start going into the details of what it means to be in a covenant. Much like a Ketubah does on a smaller scale. We could remain with "I love you and want to live with you", but we don't. We go into the details of what each partner promises to bring into their home, and to the details of what they imagine this Jewish home to look like.

So we have a lot's of laws, which we won't go into just now, and rather turn turn to look at one moment of the story, when Moshe and a group of people go back to the Sinai to sacrifice to God. And then they see this:

וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא וְשִׁבְעִים מִזִּקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּהַת רִגְלָיו כַּמַּעֲשֵׂה לִבְנַת הַסַּפִּיר וְכַעֲצֻם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר: (שמות כ"ד 9-10)

"Then Moshe and Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended; and they saw the God of Israel: under His feet there was like a fashioning of sapphire pavement, and like the very heavens for pureness."

They Saw the God of Israel. Which is amazing in itself and we have lot's of commentary trying to figure that one out. Not just now though.

We'll focus on the words "Livnat haSapir", which has been translated here to "sapphire pavement", but that isn't the only way of understanding what the words mean. the word "livnat" has very often taken to mean "white", so perhaps they were seeing something pure and diamond like under the feet of God. We can find a different understanding of this in Rabbeinu Bahya's medieval commentary of the word when he sees the word "livnat" as pointing to the word "levenah", brick. "...like the structure of a brick made of sapphire." This image recalled to them the fact that the Israelites' heavy slave labour in Egypt consisted of their making mud bricks. Seeing such an image in the heavens proved to the people viewing it that when the Israelites suffer persecution by the Gentile nations in the terrestrial world the Shechinah shares their suffering in the celestial spheres." This is an opposite but similar notion to *imitatio Dei* – not humans imitating God, but God and the heavens imitating humans.

I might want to expand the understanding to say that when there is any suffering the world, the throne of קב"ה"ה embodies it.

But we could take this also in a positive direction and say the throne of God holds much more than our suffering and is build out of the good work we do in the world. This brings us back to the minutia of Mitzvot we are given beginning with this Torah portion. Each of these mitzvot is brick, even the smallest act we do adds beauty and strength to the throne of God.

Going into this meeting today, let's use this image from Torah as a Kavanah, an intention, that all our work here as a Jewish community be towards lessening the bricks of suffering, and adding bricks of good deeds to the throne of God.

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