

Rabbi Linda Motzkin
Perlow Events, Tang Museum
February 26, 28, March 1, 2024

List of works

***All I Need*, 2024**

acrylic on handmade deerskin parchment

When the biblical patriarch Jacob meets his twin brother Esau after twenty years of estrangement, Esau says to Jacob (Gen 33:9) "I have plenty." Jacob tells Esau (Genesis 33:11) "I have all I need". The brothers' words are juxtaposed here against words from the Talmud (Shabbat 119a) in large white letters, meaning "so that you shall be enriched", from a passage which interprets the biblical command to give away a tenth of one's produce as a practice that enriches those who do so.



***Anochi/I*, 2013**

ink and acrylic on deerskin parchment

The Hebrew word *Anochi*, written large surrounded by gold, means "I", and its English translation "I" is placed over it in the column. The surrounding biblical excerpts all feature the word *anochi*: Gen 18:27 – "I am but dust and ashes"; Gen 23:4 – "I am a stranger and temporary resident with you"; Gen 4:9 – "Am I my brother's keeper?"; Gen 28:16 – "Surely the Eternal is in this place and I, I did not know." Above is a sky filled with swirls formed from the name "Amalek", which represents human evil. Each "Amalek" is crossed out, in accordance with the instruction in Deut 25:19: "Blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven."



***Avracadavra*, 2015**

ink and acrylic on deerskin parchment

The word abracadabra, now a magician's incantation, was written in the 3rd century in triangular form, in rows of diminishing letters, as an amulet to ward off illness. The Aramaic *avracadavra* (meaning "Let me create as I speak") appears here in that triangular form, surrounded by excerpts from the Ten Utterances of Creation, the ten times that God speaks, and creation occurs, in the first chapter of Genesis.



***Between Heaven and Earth*, 2022**

oil paint, colored ink (block print), and glue on handmade deerskin parchment sewn with parchment strip

According to Talmudic legend, four sages engaged in mystical exploration, including Ben Zoma, who lost his mind. In his madness (or perhaps his heightened clarity of vision), he perceived the gap between heaven and earth as tiny, almost negligible, saying: "there isn't but three fingers-width distance between them." (Chagigah 15a)



***Bloodshed*, 2016**

acrylic and ink on handmade deerskin parchment

In Genesis 9:6, God warns Noah and his descendants against killing human beings: “Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall their blood be shed, for in the image of God, God made humankind”. The six Hebrew words beginning this verse form a sort of palindrome – “shed” “blood” “human” “by human” “blood” “shed”. The Hebrew word for blood (*dam*) repeats four times, both alone and as part of the Hebrew word for human (*adam*), and is written here in red, juxtaposed against a human target practice figure.



***From Sadness to Joy*, 2021**

acrylic and henna on handmade deerskin parchment with parchment strips

Exuberant henna designs and the phrases “from sadness to joy” and “from darkness to great light” (excerpted from the Maggid section of the Passover Haggadah) surround brightly painted woven strips of parchment.



***The Human Condition*, 2023**

acrylic, ink, newspaper and glue on handmade deerskin parchment

The enlarged central words from Psalm 90:5-6 describe human beings: “at daybreak they are like grass that renews itself; at daybreak it flourishes anew, by evening it withers and dries up” along with the hope (Psalm 90:12): “Teach us to count our days that we may acquire a heart of wisdom.”

Windows opening onto pastoral scenes are framed by and contain excerpts from the daily liturgy expressing overall gratitude as well as awareness of the limitations of our physical bodies, while the smallest window contains newspaper cutouts providing a different lens on the human condition.



***In the House of Winter*, 2017**

acrylic and ink on handmade deerskin parchment

“The king is in the field” is an expression said in the summertime month of Elul, preceding the Jewish New Year, with “the king” referring to the presence of God, and “in the field” meaning among the people and open to connecting with them, as opposed to cloistered in the palace. In contrast, the words of this piece “the king is sitting in the house of winter”, which appear in the biblical book of Jeremiah, evoke a more remote sense of Divine Presence, though still perceptible. In the doorway of the winter palace are words excerpted from the Amidah, the central section of daily Jewish liturgy, which are only uttered during the winter season in praise of God: “making the winds blow and the rain fall.”



***In the Wilderness*, 2019**

ink and acrylic on handmade deerskin parchment

The harsh, forbidding and strangely beautiful environment of the desert wilderness is where the Children of Israel are left to wander for forty years, after refusing to enter the Promised Land (Exodus 14). These columns, measured as for a Torah panel, include fragments from Numbers 14 with gaps where the Hebrew name of God would have been written.



The King of Hearts, 2021

acrylic and ink on hand-made deerskin parchment

Known as the suicide king, the king of hearts is the only one in the deck of cards whose sword is not held upright but raised behind his head. The Hebrew excerpts are from the Talmud (Berachot 7a), including the prayer of God: “May my compassion overcome my anger,” and the teaching that one should not underestimate a blessing offered by a simple person. Also included is an excerpt from Numbers 14:19: “Forgive, please, through your great kindness.”



Labyrinth, 2019

liquid frisket, henna, acrylic, ink

Acknowledging our human limitations, mistakes and needs, this labyrinth intertwines Psalm 19:13 (“Who knows their own mistakes? From what is hidden from me, clear me”) with an excerpt from a Hebrew blessing after eating, addressed to the “Creator of numerous living beings and what they lack/need.”



On Dry Land in the Midst of the Sea, 2024

acrylic, oil and ink on hand-made deerskin parchment

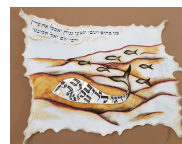
The “Song of the Sea” in Exodus 15, celebrating the passage from slavery to freedom, is laid out differently than any other passage in a Torah scroll, not as a column of text, but as interlocking lines of poetry. In the Torah scroll, the last line of the passage centers the words about crossing on dry land, while the borders on either side contain just the word *hayam* - “the sea.” In this piece, this last line excerpted from Exodus 15:19, is slightly altered to read: “Let us walk on dry land in the midst of the sea,” with the word “on dry land” repeated on the lines above.



Resilience, 2023

acrylic, ink and metal leaf on handmade deerskin parchment

The body of the fish contains words from the final blessing of the Biblical patriarch Jacob to his grandsons (Genesis 48:16): “may they proliferate abundantly like fish in the midst of the land.” This can be understood as a blessing for resilience, for the ability to survive in a place that is not one’s home, for fish do not naturally live on land. In the clouds above are excerpts from Jeremiah 29:5-6, which are part of the prophet’s instructions on survival in Babylon for the exiles from Jerusalem: “Build houses and settle and plant gardens and eat their fruit... increase there and don’t become diminished.”



Roll Down as Waters, 2015

acrylic on deerskin parchment

Emerging from a swirling wave, fashioned from the colors of land and sea, are the words from the biblical prophet Amos 5:24: “Let justice roll down as waters and righteousness as a mighty stream.” The words “justice” and “righteousness” are highlighted in dark blue, the remaining words formed out of negative space in the midst of the waters.



Rotating Wheel, 2023

ink and acrylic on handmade deerskin parchment

The Chasidic rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav taught (Sichos HaRan #40) that everything in the world is like a wheel, going in cycles: “revolving and inverting from this to that and from that to this, from low to high and from high to low”, written here on the outer wheel. On the smaller inner wheel: “Foot becomes head and head becomes foot, and so too a human being may become an angel and an angel become human.”



Source of Compassion, 2023

acrylic, glue, parchment strips and handmade deerskin parchment pieces

Broken and misshapen scraps are interwoven to create a new whole from the pieces, with the materials reflecting the message. The text is excerpted from *Selichot* prayers for forgiveness said on the Saturday night prior to *Rosh Hashanah*, the Jewish New Year: “Source of Compassion who answers the broken-hearted...who answers the poor...answer us!” The words “Source of Compassion” and “answer us!” are enlarged.



What Are We?, 2023

acrylic, metal leaf, and glue on handmade deerskin parchment pieces

Excerpts from a prayer of supplication found in the daily morning liturgy: “What are we? What is our life? What are our acts of kindness? What is our deliverance? What is our strength?” are juxtaposed with three words from Isaiah 40:26 “Who created these?” The Hebrew words for “who” and “these,” rearranged, yield both the questions “Who are these? Who?” and a possible answer: one of the Hebrew terms for God.



AlefBet, 2022

Tet, ink acrylic and glue on handmade deerskin parchment

Kuf, ink, acrylic and glue on handmade deerskin parchment

Shin, acrylic and ink on handmade deerskin parchment

Each letter of the Hebrew alphabet has its own form, numerical equivalence, and pictorial meaning. Since letters are the building blocks of words, and words are, as described in the opening chapter of the Bible, the building blocks of Creation (God spoke words and the world came into being), each letter of the Hebrew alphabet is also regarded as having its own creative, spiritual energy.

