



# Seeing Torah

## *A Visual Midrash*

Seeing Torah, an exhibit of 54 unique pieces, invites viewers to experience Torah visually and discover how the most central Jewish text can be relevant in their 21st century lives. Each piece is a visual midrash in the tradition of Jewish creative commentary--imaginative re-envisionings as seen through a woman's lens illuminating the spiritual, political, and feminist lessons living in the Torah.

Accompanied by a short commentary, every piece allows viewers to consider how Torah can be a continuing source of learning and discourse and reflect on what it means to them.

On the following pages, you will see a sample of some of the pieces in this collection. Of course, seeing the work in person is the best way to appreciate it. I look forward to the opportunity to show you Seeing Torah and to speak about opportunities to bring the entire project to your community.

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## Lech Lecha

It was when he came near to Egypt that he said to Sarai his wife: Now here, I know well that you are a woman fair to look at. It will be, when the Egyptians see you and say: She is his wife, that they will kill me, but you they will allow to live. Pray say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me on your account that I myself may live thanks to you... It was when Avram came to Egypt, that the Egyptians saw how exceedingly fair the woman was: When Pharaoh's courtier saw her, they praised her to Pharaoh, and the woman was taken away into Pharaoh's house.

Genesis 12:11-15

#MeToo



## Tazria

...when a woman at childbirth bears a male, she shall be impure seven days; she shall be impure as at the time of her menstrual infirmity... She shall remain in a state of blood purification for thirty-three days... If she bears a female, she shall be impure two weeks as during her menstruation, and she shall remain in a state of blood purification for sixty-six.

Leviticus 12:1-5

The Rules say I am impure  
because you came out of my body  
bathed in my blood and our fluids.  
But we knew that, in fact,  
we have just touched heaven  
and that the Rules allow us  
Time  
to wallow in the afterglow, to  
get to know one another, to  
ponder the possibilities of life and death,  
of elation and  
the deepest sadness we might imagine.  
O! child of mine,  
what a fine line we walk.  
Blessed is this separation,  
Blessed are you, and  
grateful am I to have touched eternity through you.

Seeing Torah  
Selected Images  
by Anita Rabinoff-Goldman

All pieces in this collection are  
10.75" square.

All pieces were created between  
October 2017 and October 2018

Quilted cotton, hand-dyed silks,  
embellishments





## Ki Tetzei

When you take the field against your enemies, and YHVH your God delivers them into your power and you take some of them captive, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman and you desire her and would take her to wife, you shall bring her into your house, and shall trim her hair, pare her nails, and discard her captive's garb. She shall spend a month's time in your house lamenting her father and mother; after that you may come to her and possess her, and she shall be your wife. Then, should you no longer want her, you must release her outright. You must not sell her for money: since you had your will of her, you must not enslave her.

Deuteronomy 21:10-14

Can we talk about the women? When I read these verses as well as subsequent lines regarding women's status as daughters, wives, rape victims, chosen, possessed, dispossessed, I want to scream! Where are the voices of these women in Torah?

Many sources will say that, for the time, Torah is providing increased protections for the women discussed in these legislations. But I hear their cries and their exasperations. I expect more from the Torah that commands us to feed the hungry and care for the less fortunate among us. I expect Torah to count me, to hear my voice, and to acknowledge my wholeness as a member of our Jewish community and the community at large.



## Vayelech

Moses went and spoke these things to all Israel. He said to them: I am now one hundred and twenty years old, I can no longer be active. Moreover, YHVH has said to me, "You shall not go across yonder Jordan."

Deuteronomy 31:1-2

A few weeks before I turned 60, my first grandchild was born. Like other transformative experiences, it was one I couldn't begin to understand until it happened to me. I was "over the moon" with gratitude and love upon his arrival, my heart was overflowing. Days later, when I had to leave him and his parents to go back home, I began to think, "how will this story end?" I was moving toward my own third act, pondering retirement and the reality that in fact, I will not live forever. I thought about this beautiful boy and how he will have his own story that will go on beyond my days. And I wondered just what that will look like. I was blessed to have a strong, smart, and loving grandmother who lived to a ripe old age. She endured many hardships and enjoyed many blessings as well. Like Moses, we don't get to cross over to Jordan and we don't know how the stories will end. But we can do our best to make our own stories meaningful to those who follow.

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## Theme

Seeing Torah is a visual diary documenting my study and artistic response to each of the 54 portions of the Torah over the cycle of a single Jewish year. It is my hope that by adding my voice to the long-running conversation that is the reading and interpretation of Torah, viewers will encounter the text in fresh ways and deepen and broaden their own explorations of it. In this way, the work is a visual midrash in the tradition of Jewish creative commentary--imaginative re-envisionings that both enhance and illuminate the text for all who seek to be refreshed by it.

The voice I bring to this project is that of a woman, a wife, a mother and a grandmother. I look for often overlooked women in the text because we were surely a part of the story even if we were often nameless. I look for ways in which our historic leaders might inform today's political climate. I look for the reasons someone might have behaved in a particular way towards another and consider how it applies to our own relationships. Seeing Torah is infused with a desire to present the heart and spiritual weight of the stories we continue to read and value.

## Artist's Statement



Quilts are my canvas, fabrics my paint. While visual imagery may be transferable between media, the added tactile dimension of the quilt, along with the emotional dimension that fabric carries with it, makes quilt-making a particularly potent expressive force for me. My goal with this project is to create a compilation of Torah stories by means of both visual and tactile images that, together, illuminate those sections of text that especially resonate for me.

One way we understand our world is through stories; another is through art. Torah is the story of the Jewish people--parts of it historical, parts political, parts allegorical, parts mystical, parts poetic. It is also a piece of my personal history. While I have heard every Torah portion at one time or other in my life, until I embarked on this project I had never read the Torah sequentially and in its entirety. The result is a 54-piece collection of artistic renderings that is both a unified whole--the entire Torah presented sequentially--and also separate components that range from fantastical to literal, from political to playful. Using small "canvases" in the form of individual 11" square works comes naturally to me. I like the immediacy and intimacy such pieces allow, having created such small visual responses in the past to particular pieces of text I'd studied and also in response to events in my own life.

While I use a variety of techniques in my work, I take my response to the text and create imagery by collaging fabrics made of many kinds of patterns, colors and textures. The fabrics often speak to me with their unique personalities, guiding me in my choices. A single piece can have many, many distinct kinds of fabric, each swatch different from the others yet together forming a holistic whole. The pieces in this collection are purposely unfinished. Finished edges would imply that the particular image, the particular interpretation, was the only one to be had. But Torah study is an ongoing process, and interpretation is fluid, allowing both the artist and the viewer to add their own experience of it each time they encounter it. The loose threads represent and invite this view.