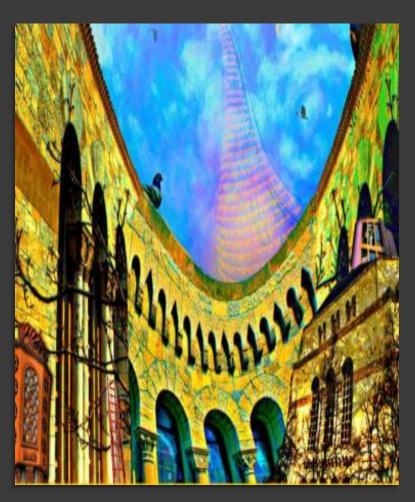
CAPTURING HOLINESS: PHOTOGRAPHY AND TORAH TEXT



Photography of Stewart Cherlin

Temple Sholom of Chicago Mendelson Gallery Exhibit October 29-December 17, 2010 Capturing Holiness is dedicated to my wife and life partner, Marilyn. Thank you for your love all these years.

Capturing Holiness: A Story

Mishnah Ta'anit tells of Honi the Circle-maker who was renowned for his ability for having his prayers answered.

On one occasion when God did not send rain, Honi drew a circle in the dust, stood inside it, and informed God that he would not move until it rained.

When it began to drizzle, Honi told God that he was not satisfied and expected more rain; it became a strong downpour.

Honi was still not satisfied. He requested a calm rain.

The rain calmed to a steady gentle rain.

Capturing Holiness juxtapositions Torah text with natural images such as landscapes and commonplace objects. Inner and outer worlds converge.

The exhibited photographs express my personal insights into the meaning of Torah text through visual commentary.

Each image explores borders and boundaries in the combined realm of photographic imagery and sacred text.

The spirit of the work honors the prohibition against creating graven images by exploring the natural world and calling upon Torah text to illuminate it, to <u>encircle its boundaries</u>.

Like Honi the Circle-maker, one asks God for rain and prays for understanding.

הנבישה איוות אהרן את התה בידה ותצאן כי

Capturing Holiness is based on Torah text. The thematic material consists of verses of Torah combined with photographic images mostly taken within the past five years although some pieces incorporate photos, drawings, painting, and objects captured over the past 35 years. בראשיתברא אלתים את השפוים ואדת דהאר

והארץ היתה תהו ובהו ואשך על פני דבדםןם וו

אלתים פורופת על פני הפוים ויאפור אלתים

אלתים בין האור ובין דהוזשך ויקרא אלתים לא

יום ול אשר קרא ליכלה זיהי ערב וידםי בקר

אזזד

ויאפור אלתים יהי רקיע בתוך הפוים וידי בובדיל

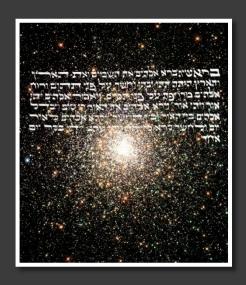
ביים לפוים ויעש אלהים את דברקיע ויבדיל בין ד

אשר פותאת לרקיע ובין הפוים איור מעל לרקיע

בן ויקרא אלתים לרקיע שפים ויהי ערב ויהי בקר

שני

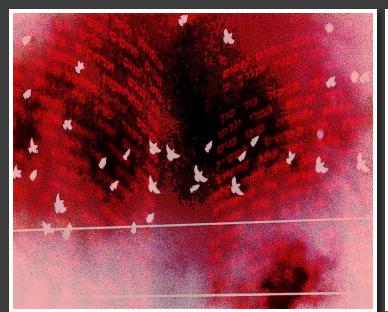
ניאפור אלתים יקון הפוים פותאת השפוים אלי כ





TRANSFORMATION OF TEXT AND IMAGE

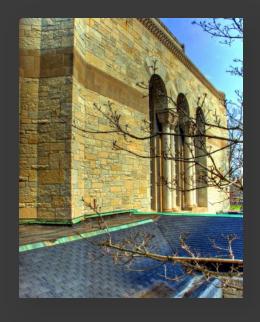
Text and photos are layered together to create a visual commentary, a personal vision and interpretation of Torah.

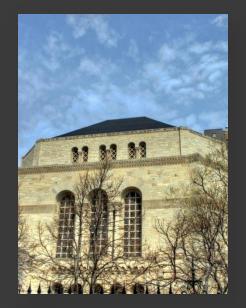


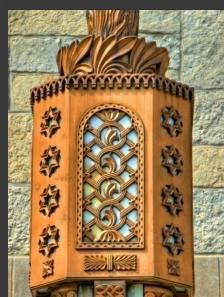




The first studies in the series included images integrated with printed text. Words morph into birds as they fly off of the page.









How the photos are created

High definition photographs are taken,

digitally processed and combined using imaging software.







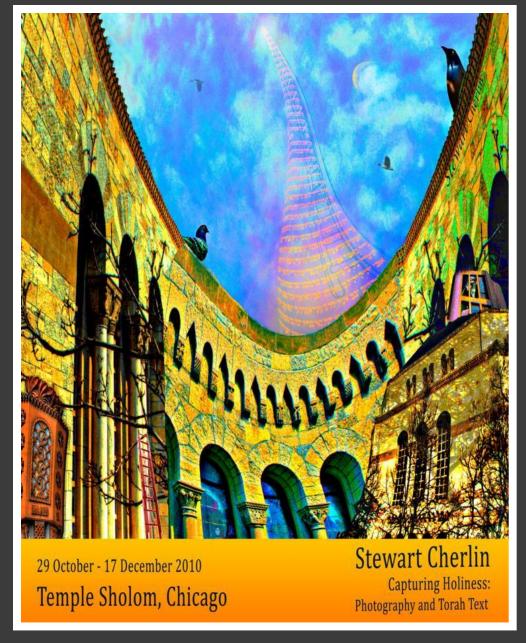








את מוזכת כת ישמעאל בן אברתם אחות נביות על נשיי כין כאשיה חרנה ופגע במקום וילן שם פי בא העכוע ויקח מאבני תמקום ישם מראשתיו וישכם בסמום ההיא וייזכם ותנה ככי"ם מוצבי אורה וראשו מונע קשמימת ותנה מלאמי אלהים עכ"ים וירד"ם בו והנה יהוה נצב עליו ויאפור אני יהוה אלהי אברהם אביך ואלדים יצוזק הארץ אשר אתה שכב עמית כך אתננה וכזרעך ותייה, זרשך כעפר הארץ ופרצת יכות וקרכוה וינפנה ונגבה ונברכו כך כל משפות הארכות ובזרער ותנת אנכי עכוך ושפורתיך בכל אשר תכיך ותנת אנכי עכוך ושפורתיך בכל אשר תכיך והשבתיך אם הארכות הזאת כי לא אעזבר עד אשר אם עשיתי את אשר דברתי י שות התחת כי מא אטובף עד אשר אם עם הזה ואנכי כדא כך וייקין יעקב משנהו ויאמור אכן יש יהוה במקים הזה ואנכי כדא ידעה יו ידעה אואמור מתנורא המוקום הזה אין זה כי אם בית אלהים וזה שער השכוים וישכם יעקב בבקר ויקוז את האבן אשר מראשתיו וישם אתה מוצכה ויצק שמן על ראשה ויכרא את שם המוקום ההוא בית אל ואולם לוז שם העיר לראשנה וידרה יעקב נדר האכור אם היה אלהים עכודי ושכורני בדרך הזה אשר אנכי הוכך ונתן כי לוום כאכם ובנדם לכש ושבתי בשכום אם כידי אבי והיה יהות כי כאכתים והאבן הזאת אשר שכותי מצבה יהיק. בית אכהים וכל אשר התן כי עשר אעשרנו כך וישא יעקב רגכ"יו ייכך ארצה בני קדם וירא והנה באר כשדה והנה שם שכשה עדר" צאן רבצים יירה ביי הדם וירא והנה באר כשדה והנה שם שכשה עדר"



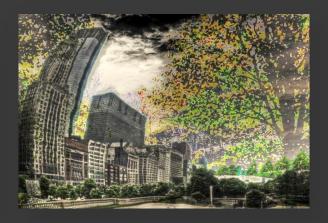
Multiple layers are transformed to create a unified composition. Images are layered, reshaped, joined and spliced.

The poster illustrated here was created especially for the exhibit. It consists of 50 plus layers and objects mostly from the temple.

The Torah text ascending to the heavens is the passage Jacob's Ladder from parashat Vayetzei.











<u>Creative Development</u>

Often the photographs are variations upon a theme.



Song at the Sea

The text becomes integral to a landscape as in the setting of Song at the Sea.



Song of the Sea with Peacock

As a composition progresses whimsical elements are introduced such as an unexpected peacock or a tallis covering a river bank.



Song at the Sea

Reoccurring Themes

The same text from Beshalach is re-cast inside a turbulent sea.

Birds are scattered in all directions as the waves tumble and turn.

Color bursts forward with the agitated waves.



Ma-Tovu

Tallit, a symbol of prayer appear in settings of <u>Kedoshim</u> and <u>Ma-Tovu</u>. The text and prayer shawl are expressive elements in the composition.



Kedoshim



In the story of Balak the words become an engraved bas relief similar to a cuneiform tablet.

Balak depicted as a Sumerian idol tries to mute the voice of the talking animal by grasping its mouth.

Balak



Akedah, the Binding of Isaac

In the <u>Akedah</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Binding of Isaac</u> the text becomes a wall or barrier in a dark landscape.

A vulture descends; symbolic of an angel.

The clouds and dark spaces represent a dream state.



Lech l'cha

In <u>Lech l'cha</u> the text is an unrolled scroll marking the journey of Abram.

The scroll serves as a passageway.

Birds add a element of movement or migration.



The Burning Bush

In the <u>Burning</u>
<u>Bush</u> text fills a vibrant blue sky.

The bush is illuminated by lightning (fire) yet is not consumed.

The high contrast adds a sense of holiness to the moment.

The blazing light originating in the clouds and sky illuminates and transforms the text.



In <u>Kol D'varim</u> a white flame from a havdalah candle soars skyward into blazing clouds.

Birds, a frequent visitor to the photographs, ascend to the heavens. They are transformed by the fire.

Kol D'varim



Rebbes lost in thought

Irony and humor are also an important element in the photographs.

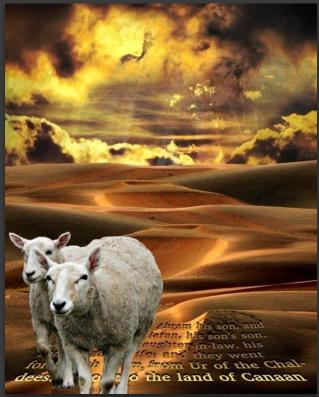
Here rebbes are lost in thought as they wander the foothills of Tibet, a yak looks at us in wonderment and dismay.



le miroir du destin - hommage a M. Chagall

Some of the photos introduce personal artistic influences such as the image of a rabbi from a Marc Chagall painting against a Paris backdrop.

A woman sweeps the street onto the same photo as a comet descends from the night sky.



The Journey of Abram and Terah

In the <u>Journey of Abram and Terah</u> text rests on the ground and becomes part of the journey like a carpet or roadmap. The sheep walk outside the boundary of the photo towards us.



Jacob's Dream

At times the photos implicitly invoke the underline text such as in Jacob's Dream. The landscape reflects the serenity experienced by Jacob upon realizing the holiness of place, as the text reads, "Jacob awoke from his sleep, and he said: 'God was in this place; and I did not know." Bereishit 28:16

לשם לזבחי אלהיהן ויאכ הלא את אשיר ישים יהוה בלראשי העם והוכע אות ייאבור מכיין בכק פיך צא בוישראל ויאכור משה א -תראבן כושם אפס קצהו בעל פעור והנה איש מום וקבצו כי כושים ויקחהו שרה שיני כושה ולעיני כל שי צה רבן שבעה מוזבוות ויעל רירא פינחס בז אלעזר ם יפור אל בלק התיצב כה על בידו ויבא אחר איש ישר יהוה אל בלמם וישם מלבלק וכה תדבר ויכא אליו הכותים בכוגפה ארבעי י בוואב אתו ויאבור לו בלק ידבר יהוה אל משה לא שלו ויאבור קום בלק ושבוע את דוכותי כועל בני ישי פא איש אל ויבדב ובן אדם בצי ישראל בקנאתי לכ לא יעשה ודבר וכא יקימונה לו ולזרעו אחריו ברית כ בני ישראל ושם אישי לוא נעיא בית אב כש אל מוציאם ממצרים שיר ראש אכוות בית

Ma-tovu Torah text



Ma-tovu

In another setting of Ma-tovu a heron and transparent blue pigeons occupy a marshland landscape between the pages of parchment.

The seam, the blank space between the text, becomes alive as the images accompany the words.



Jacob, Esau and Isaac

Jacob, Easu, and Isaac from Toledot is a story of family reconciliation.

The image depicts
Torah text reflected
in a wine goblet. The
opposite matching
sides represent the
brothers coming
together for the last
time.

The Hebrew language reflects unity of dual objects in words for face (panayim) or heavens (shamayim).



Joseph's Dream, Shabbos Goats

<u>Joseph's Dream, Shabbos</u> <u>Goats</u> explores the realm and of fantasy and dreams.

Goats descend the side of a building as if on a staircase or escalator. The goats are symbolic of the seven years of abundance that are followed by seven years of famine in Joseph's dream.

The tallis in the upper corners of the image sway in the cool night breeze towards the heavens.

The objects on the table represent Shabbos including candles, a tallis bag, a prayer book, and folded glasses. A time to be thankful to God, a time to rest.







Moses und Aron

Music is also a central component reflected in many of the photographs. The two examples here are based on works by the composer Arnold Schoenberg. Pages of his music manuscripts are part of the graphic composition.

To recap, Capturing Holiness juxtapositions Torah text with natural images such as landscapes and commonplace objects. Inner and outer worlds converge.

Objects such as trees, birds, tallit, and text are symbolic components of the overall work.

The exhibited photographs express my personal insights into the meaning of Torah text through visual commentary.

Each image explores borders and boundaries in the combined realm of photographic imagery and sacred text.

The spirit of the work honors the prohibition against creating graven images by exploring the natural world and calling upon Torah text to illuminate it, to <u>encircle its boundaries</u>.

Like Honi the Circle-maker, one asks God for rain and prays for understanding.

I would like to thank Temple Sholom for hosting Capturing Holiness, you provide Kedushat Makom (sanctity of place). I hope you will enjoy the exhibit and capture a spark of holiness from my work.

The exhibit works are available for sale. A portion of each sale is donated to Temple Sholom.

Special thanks to:

Marilyn, Adam, and Danny Cherlin for allowing me to pursue my art Dan Koch, who introduced me to Temple Sholom, Dan you are a dear friend Netiva Caftori who opened a door

Rabbi Amy Memis-Foler and Temple Judea Mizpah for allowing me to photograph the congregations' holocaust scroll; the very special sacred text Mat MacCumber and Lisa Kaplan who helped me step by step to realize the exhibit

Cantor Aviva Katzman for inspiring music and prayer Rabbi Aaron Petuchowski and the Temple Sholom congregational family for a special Shabbat. Temple Sholom is truly one of Chicago's great treasures. And lastly thanks to my friends and colleagues who are here supporting my work.

October 29, 2010 – Chesvan 22, 5771

This concludes a brief overview of Capturing Holiness. Thank you for providing a place to exhibit my work. I hope you'll enjoy the exhibit.

Good Shabbos / Shabbat Shalom!