Sanctity of Time, Sanctity of Place, and Sanctity of the Human Being

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Introduction

One of the most intriguing, absorbing, and significant theological topics is the concept of *k'dushah*, sanctity. All who deal with this fascinating subject agree that sanctity is the encounter between the human and the Divine, for "holy, holy, holy is the Eternal One of Hosts" (Isaiah 6:3)—God is the source of all holiness. And because God is generally conceived as the transcendent, ineffable Master of the Universe, beyond human understanding and beyond the limits of nature, conventional wisdom would identify and equate sanctity with spirituality—and thus the search for spirituality would entail escaping from the material world roundabout and attempting to enter a supernal, ethereal world far away. This is the essence of Soloveitchik's depiction of the typological "religious man" in his important work, *Halakhic Man*.[1]

To a great extent, the major commentaries on the biblical commandment "You shall be holy" (Leviticus 19:2) follow this line of interpretation. Rashi, for example, interprets the words "be holy" to mean "be separate," thus commanding separation from sin and especially from forbidden sexual relationships. Naḥmanides goes even further, advocating general abstention from the excess materialism of this world, suggesting that one ought separate oneself even from materialistic pleasures that are biblically permissible. According to these views, holiness requires separation from the material world in which we live.

My teacher and mentor, Rav Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchik of blessed memory, provides a very different perspective in his article "Sacred and Profane, *Kodesh* and Chol in World Perspective."[2] He rejects escaping, abstaining, and withdrawing from the physical world in order to find sanctity and spirituality, and prescribes instead bringing God into every aspect of our physical universe, and increasing the places of God's entry to embrace every aspect of our material world. After all, the entire universe belongs to the blessed Holy One and "there is no place devoid of the potential for actualizing the presence [of God]." In the words of the famed Rebbe Menahem Mendel of Kotzk, "'Where is the place of God's glory?' Wherever you let God in!" And we must do everything in our power to enable God to enter into every moment and into every place in our lives and in our world.

In this essay, I hope to follow in the footsteps of Rav Soloveitchik, and demonstrate how sanctity must be brought into the world (1) through the human encounter with the Divine in the dimension of time, as it is manifested in our festivals, and (2) through the human encounter with the Divine in the dimension of space, as it is manifested in the sanctuary and the world at large. And it is the human being who is responsible to bring this about, the human being created in God's image and thereby endowed with a spark of the Divine, who is empowered to actualize the divine sanctity within every aspect of the universe.

Let us begin with "time" and the festivals. The first biblical reference to sanctity is in conjunction with time, with reference to the Sabbath: "And God blessed the Sabbath day and made it *holy*" (Genesis 2:3).

Reflections of the Biblical Chapter of the Festivals

Let us now turn to the chapter of the festivals in Leviticus 23. This passage, as we will shortly see, raises a number of questions.

The word *mo·eid*, "festival," literally means "meeting," "rendezvous," or "appointed time," as the use of the same root in Amos 3:3 demonstrates: "Do two walk together, unless they have agreed to meet (*no·adu*)?" The annual festivals are "meetings" or "encounters" in two senses. First, they are an encounter between the Jewish people and God, as the Torah says: "Three times a year, all your males shall be seen toward the face of the Master, the Eternal" (Exodus 23:17). Second, they are an encounter between the Jewish people and specific momentous events in its history, moments when the Divine Presence had been especially manifest. Each of the three pilgrimage festivals testifies to a different historical event: Pesah, our freedom from Egyptian enslavement; Shavuot, our receiving of the Torah of ethics, morality, and human responsibility at Sinai; and Sukkot, our survival despite our wanderings through an alien and hostile desert environment. Hence in these moments of time we encounter the God of Freedom, the God of Torah and Morality, and the God of Protection.

The Sabbath Day

The Torah's chapter about the festivals, Leviticus 23, opens with Shabbat, which the Bible apparently sees as a primary festival, a *mo·eid*, an appointed time of human meeting with the Divine:

> And the Eternal spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the Israelites and say to them, 'These are My appointed festivals, the appointed festivals of the Eternal, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. For six days work may be done, but the seventh day is a day of Shabbat rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work, wherever you live; it is a Shabbat to the Eternal'" (verses 1–3).

Calling Shabbat a sacred, appointed time means that Shabbat is a time in which we meet God, a time of momentous significance, a time that touches eternity.

Time without God is an undifferentiated succession of seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years—periods that move on inexorably, automatically, impervious to human beings and their experiences, in which people live out their lives between the tick-tocks of a blind and unfeeling Master Clock. The prophet of futility, Kohelet, says it frighteningly well: "A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth [i.e., the clock] continues forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and at the place where it yearned to rest, it only rises again from there. [The sun] goes toward the South, veers round toward the North; round and round it moves with the wind, and on its cyclical journey it returns with the wind" (Kohelet 1:4–6).

Time without God is cyclically sisyphean, repetitive without meaning or endgame, mocking the foolish strivings and sacrifices of the various peoples who move in its wake. As Shakespeare put it, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day, / To the last syllable of recorded time."[3] It is a petty pace—not a progressive, meaningful march (*halakhah*)—because individual life, even the life of humans in the world, is nothing more substantive than the vapor (*hevel*) we exhale on a cold day. It is "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."[4]

But this is not so, if life is a tale told by God—if world and life were created by a God of love and plan, and purpose. This is the message of that primordial seventh day, distinguished from what came before it and after it, a special day on which humans are bidden to share with God a rendezvous in sacred time:

> And God saw all that God had made [in creating the world] and behold it was very good; and it was the evening and the morning of the sixth day. And the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their array. And God completed on the seventh day the creative work that God had done; and God rested on the seventh day from all the creative work that God had done. And God blessed the seventh day and made

> it holy, because on it God rested from all the creative work that God had created to do (Genesis 1:31–2:3).

What occurred on that momentous and significant seventh day? God recognized the "goodness" of creation, seeing that it was not necessary to repetitively do again what had already been accomplished without ever arriving at a finish line. This seventh day grants a glimpse into the eventual possibility of reaching fruition, of arriving at an endgame, of enjoying the light at the end of the tunnel. On that seventh day God created redemption, the possibility of bringing the entire material world into the orbit of the Divine.[5]

At the same time, in placing Shabbat as the first of the *mo·adim*, the appointed meeting places between people and God, the individual is empowered to enter into close relationship with God in *time*, during an entire day—thereby making that day with God qualitatively different from any other day of the week. This sacred Shabbat reveals the enormous implication of humanity having been created in God's image, endowed with a portion of God, and commanded to emulate God's characteristics:[6] just as God creates worlds, so too must we create worlds, and just as God rested on the Sabbath, thereby activating world redemption (which Rashi calls the creation of *m'nuḥah*), so too must we rest on the Sabbath, thereby glimpsing the reality of world redemption.

If indeed the Sabbath day establishes our fellowship with God, even our partnership with God ("Just as God…so must we…")—a meeting in which we actually "shake hands" (as it were) to work together—then we must devote this seventh day to coming closer to our Partner-in-Heaven, to learning better how to make our smaller worlds part of God's greater world, how to prepare ourselves and our world for redemption. Then Shabbat can truly become a time that touches eternity, and can become a truly sacred day. And we must make Shabbat so; we must actively "do" Shabbat. The Torah tells us: "And the Israelites shall observe Shabbat, to make [or "do"] Shabbat for their generations, as an eternal covenant [or: a covenant with the

world]" (Exodus 31:16). This is the higher meaning of our "making Kiddush," of our sanctifying the Sabbath day along with the Creator of the universe.

The Festivals

The verse that marks the weekly Shabbat as a special, prototypical appointed time of the human-Divine encounter also opens the biblical discussion of other sacred times, the days of the yearly festivals: "These are the appointed festivals of the Eternal, sacred assemblies, which you shall announce in their due season" (Leviticus 23:4). This general introduction is followed by the festival of *matzot* (unleavened bread), the first of the festivals, on the fourteenth day of the month of Nisan, the first month of the year (Leviticus 23:5–8). The next verses deal with the reaping of the *omer* barley offering and the reaping of the first of the ripened grain (which is the fundamental base of physical sustenance), which express the human encounter with the Universal Sustainer in the land of Israel (Leviticus 23:9–22). The *omer*-count then continues for seven weeks, forty-nine days, culminating in the festival of the first fruits, Shavuot: its offering of two *hallah* loaves, representing the ripening of the last of the grains—wheat, which produces bread, the staff of life—thus symbolizes the completion and perfection of Israel's produce and God's bounty (but note that the initial barley *omer* offering was considered to be the grain eaten by animals). And the Oral Law adds that Shavuot is likewise the day of the divine revelation at Sinai, when Israel encountered God as the Teacher of Torah and morality.

Beginning the Jewish calendar of sacred days with the festival of our freedom, Passover, following the sacred Sabbath day, intensifies the profound message of our having been created in the divine image: just as God is free, so must every human being be free. Our God-encounter on those days must teach us our responsibility as God's partners—to attempt to free every human being who is enslaved by any other human being—as well as the necessity of making ourselves

free of negative character traits, of toxic human addictions. And the command for us to begin counting every day "from the morrow of the Sabbath" (rabbinically interpreted to mean the day following the first day of the festival of *matzot*) emphasizes the truth that it is only a free individual who is able to count time, who is empowered to make time count; a master removes such an ability from slaves, and thereby robs them of the very essence of their humanity, the ability to encounter God and fulfill the divinely mandated responsibility to perfect the world in the sovereignty of God.

Marking the agricultural cycle from barley to bread (including the magnificent fruits for which Israel is praised) and leading up to our festival of first fruits likewise expresses our partnership with God in working the land and providing human sustenance; such an occupation is a sacred endeavor and a meaningful divine encounter. The Torah—the constitution we received from God at Sinai—defines our mission as a nation; it emphasizes the ethical and moral responsibilities of freedom and allows us a glimpse into what free individuals can accomplish together with God: ending enslavement and exile, reaching a homeland, and establishing a successful agricultural society providing for a sabbatical year of rest for the land as well as for the farmers, or a respectable avenue of employment for the poor, the widow, and the stranger. The prophetic vision of the Temple was of a place to serve as a guidepost and beacon of light to all the families of the earth, teaching Torah to all humanity (Isaiah 2:2–4, Micah 4:1–3).

Following the cycle of the year, the next festival mentioned in the Torah is Rosh Hashanah: "And the Eternal spoke to Moses, saying: Speak to the Israelites and say to them: 'In the seventh month, on the first of the month, you will have a *shabbaton* of remembrance of the *shofar* blowing, a sacred assembly. You shall not do any work, and you shall present a fire offering to the Eternal'" (Leviticus 23:23–25). In verse 24, Rosh Hashanah is described as a shabbaton, as is the very next festival of Yom Kippur: "But on the tenth [day] of this seventh month is a Day of Atonement, at-one-ment, [i.e., forgiveness].

You will have a sacred assembly, and you shall afflict your souls; you shall offer a fire offering to the Eternal….It is a *shabbat shabbaton* for you….From the evening of the ninth day of the month, until the following evening, you are to observe your Shabbat" (Leviticus 23:27–32). These two festivals empower us to encounter the God of Creation and the God of Forgiveness.

Next comes the festival of Sukkot, which is not described as a *shabbaton*; rather, we read: "On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the festival of Sukkot, seven days for the Eternal" (Leviticus 23:34). The biblical text then mentions the festival of the Eighth Day (Shemini Atzeret), declaring the special sacredness of the first and last days which forbid work, but it does not in any way explain the ritual of the *sukkot* (booths), nor does it make reference to the taking of the four species, or explain in any way the significance of Shemini Atzeret.

And then comes the conclusion of the entire festival passage: "These are the Eternal's appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies for bringing fire offerings to the Eternal—the burnt offerings and grain offerings, sacrifices and drink offerings required for each day, in addition to those for the Eternal's Shabbat-days, and in addition to your gifts and whatever you have vowed and all the voluntary offerings you give to the Eternal" (Leviticus 23:37–38).

However, this apparent conclusion is then followed by a return to and further discussion of the festival of Sukkot, but this time the Bible introduces the commandment of the four species and explains the significance of the *sukkot*:

> But on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Eternal for seven days; the first day is a *shabbaton* and the eighth day is also a *shabbaton*. On the first day you are to take the fruit of a special tree, palm branches, a leafy branch, and a willow

> sprig—and rejoice before the Eternal your God for seven days. Celebrate this as a festival to the Eternal for seven days each year. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come; celebrate it in the seventh month. Live in booths (*sukkot*) for seven days: All native-born Israelites are to live in such booths, so that your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt. I am the Eternal your God." (Leviticus 23:39–43)

And then comes the final conclusion: "Thus Moses announced the Eternal's appointed times to the Israelites" (Leviticus 23:44). It is unclear why the verses about the festival of Sukkot are divided into two parts by what now seems to have been a pseudo-conclusion. It is important to note that in the second part, Sukkot is classified as a *shabbaton*, whereas in the first part, it is not described thus. And it is noteworthy that the term *shabbaton* is used in conjunction with Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the second passage that describe Sukkot, but not in the passages describing Pesah, Shavuot, and the first passage about Sukkot.

In summary, this chapter presents us with three major problems:

1. Why is the term *shabbaton* used for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and the second Sukkot passage, but not for the first Sukkot passage and not for the other festivals? And what is the significance of the linguistic linkage between *shabbaton* and Shabbat?
2. Why is the description of Sukkot divided into two parts, with only the second part mentioning the four species?
3. The festivals can be categorized in two ways: one approach pertains to the agricultural cycle of gathering, harvesting, planting, etc., and the other approach relates to the commemoration of historical events such as the Exodus from Egypt, the journey through the desert, and the revelation at Sinai. Rosh

> Hashanah and Yom Kippur, however, do not fall into either approach: they are not related to the agricultural cycle, nor do they seem to commemorate any particular historical event. If so, how can we understand these two festivals and their relation to the other appointed times of the Jewish year?

Toward the conclusion of this essay, we shall attempt to answer these questions.

Further Reflections on the Concept of Sanctity

As we attempt to answer our questions and arrive at a more nuanced understanding of sanctity, it is important to reflect on two works of secular scholarship that discuss the concept of sanctity. The first is Rudolph Otto's *The Idea of the Holy*,[7] where the word "numinous" is used to describe the idea of sanctity; it is a word that evokes awesome mystery, the different and the unknown, the mysterious bordering on the occult. In this context, sanctity becomes connected with fear of God, the sublime and awe-ful *mysterium tremendum*. The numinous fascinates but also repels, inspiring frightful admiration but also suggesting distance and human diminution.

The second book, *The Sacred and the Profane*, is by Mircea Eliade,[8] an anthropologist and historian of religion. As mentioned above, my mentor and teacher Rabbi Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, also wrote an article by the same title, which expresses similar ideas to those of Eliade, and emphasizes the desire of humans to find God in every aspect of world. Rav Soloveitchik adds that sanctity is a "paradox" rather than a "paradise": sanctity requires perpetual striving, sacrifice, commitment, and creativity. This definition contrasts significantly with the classical Jewish understanding of avoidance and restraint, a separation from the material which is largely a passive expression; sanctity according to Rav Soloveitchik is an active enterprise of seeking God in time and place. It requires perpetual creativity,

ceaseless activity on the part of the human being to reach out and up in order to bring God into the here-and-now, everywhere.

The Sacred as a Link to God and Eternity

This approach to sanctity is an encounter between the human and the Divine, the fleeting and the ephemeral with the Permanent and the Eternal. God is the only real entity in the world, who bestows actual being, true existence. Outside of God we are left only with the vapor (*hevel*) of Kohelet, the appearance of substance but doomed for almost immediate disintegration. An encounter between God and a particular time creates sanctity, sanctity of time. Similarly, an encounter between God and a particular place creates sanctity of place. Because God is the entity who grants eternity to both time and place, the encounter between God and a particular event in history or a particular place in the world necessarily creates sanctity, enabling that time or that event or that place to interact and interface with the Divine, and thereby to participate in eternity.

The Sacred Dance between God and Humans in Time and Space

This is evident in the first appointed time, when the idea of sanctity is first mentioned in the Bible: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it sacred" (Genesis 2:3). And, as we have seen earlier, the first *mo·eid* or "holy convocation" in the book of Leviticus is Shabbat (23:3).

This idea is also echoed in the holiest of places, in the Temple (or sanctuary), the *mikdash*. Since the sanctuary is a meeting-place between God and humans (cf. Exodus 25:8, "They shall make Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them"), it may be seen as a Shabbat in space. The Temple is the place that humans make for God, complementing the world that God made for humans. God declares the Sabbath to be a sacred day where humans can meet

with the Divine through the medium of the world, which God has made for them as a sanctuary in time; humans declare the Temple a sacred space where God can meet with us through the medium of a place that we have made for God, a Shabbat in space.[9] And in both realms, time and space, eternity is achieved by a sacred dance between God and human. In time, it is God who brings humans close to the Divine; in space, it is humans who must bring God down to them. Ultimately humans must re-create the *entire* world as a sanctuary fit for God, and herein lies the human task of *tikkun olam*.

Tikkun Olam: Bringing God Down

The Kedushah prayer declares, "Holy, holy, holy is the Eternal One of Hosts, the whole world is filled with God's glory" (Isaiah 6:3), and the Zohar explains, "No place is [potentially] devoid of God." Sanctity does not result from withdrawing and abstaining from the world, but rather from our bringing God down into the world and filling it with God's glory. Similarly, Maimonides[10] interprets the notion of "God's glory" (*k'vodo*) as God's presence in the world, the Shekhinah or the immanent Divine Presence. In the morning blessings before the Shema, we follow the praise "Holy, holy, holy is the Eternal One of Hosts, the whole world is filled with God's glory" with a verse from Ezekiel: "Blessed is the glory (*kavod*) of the Eternal One, from God's place" (Ezekiel 3:12). This is usually taken to mean that God's glory emanates from an exalted supernal place in the heavens. However, I would instead interpret this verse to mean, "More blessed is the [immanent] glory of the Eternal [on earth] than [is the transcendent glory from] God's exalted place in the heavens."[11] There is transcendental divinity and immanent divinity; Judaism emphasizes the need to incorporate the transcendental divinity into the world so that it becomes immanent. God is more blessed when present in this world, than when located in isolated splendor beyond this world.

This idea is also expressed in the prayer U-va L'tziyyon Go·eil ("A Redeemer Will Come to Zion"), which cites the Aramaic translation-interpretation of Targum Yonatan to the verse from Isaiah (6:3). In this prayer, the celestial beings receive permission from one another to praise God and they interpret the three domains of God's holiness: "Holy in the highest heavens, home of God's presence; holy on earth, the work of God's power; holy forever and for all time." Here, the three degrees of sanctity of God are presented in ascending order: first, we mention the holiness of the transcendental divinity, "holy in the highest heavens"; then, we mention the holiness of immanent divinity, "holy on earth, the work of God's power"; and finally, we mention the holiness of the divinity throughout history, "holy forever and for all time."[12]

The greatest challenge for humankind, therefore, is to bring God into this world and into our time, to transform the transcendental Eternal One into the immanent Shekhinah. In the book *Halakhic Man*, Rabbi Soloveitchik explains that the way to achieve this immanence is through *halakhah*, which explains the dictum of our talmudic sages, "The blessed Holy One has nothing in this world but the four cubits of the Law" (B. Berakhot 8a). Thus, the laws of *kashrut* bring the sanctity of the Divine into the kitchen, the laws of family purity bring the sanctity of the Divine into the bedroom, and the Jewish legal laws of *Ḥoshen Mishpat* bring the sanctity of the Divine into the workplace.

I once heard a wonderful teaching about this from Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik, of blessed memory. There are two contradictory verses in the book of Psalms, which need to be harmonized. The first verse reads, "To the Eternal is the earth and all of its fullness" (Psalm 24:1), while another verse states, "The heavens, the heavens belong to the Eternal, while God gave the earth to humankind" (Psalm 115:16). How does one reconcile these two ideas? The Talmud explains: "One verse applies before one offers a blessing, and the other applies after one offers a blessing" (B. Berakhot 35a). The conventional commentaries (including Rashi) explain that before one makes a

blessing the food belongs to God, and afterward the food belongs to the person who made the blessing. Indeed, it is the blessing that gives us the right to partake of God's world and requisition a specific aspect of it for our own personal use.

Rabbi Aharon Soloveitchik, however, interprets the tension between the verses in a completely different way. According to him, a person who has not yet recited a blessing (or does not recite a blessing at all) sees two separate worlds or two separate realms: heaven, which belongs to God, and earth, which belongs to people. Never do the two worlds meet. However, a person who is immersed in the world of blessings is able to perceive the sublime within the mundane, the Godly within the earthly, the transcendent nature of God within the immanent universe. The food he or she is about to eat becomes a bridge between this world and God. Through the blessing, a person is able to bring God down into this world. Therefore, *after*—and as a result of—eating the fruit with a blessing, an individual can truly feel that "the entire world belongs to God." Indeed, a person can bring God into the material world even by means of an object as mundane as an apple or a piece of bread.

Through this, one can understand Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's teaching that one of God's names is *ha-makom* ("the Place, or "the Omnipresent in the Here-and-Now"): since it is this world in which God yearns to be eternally present, it is up to us—the inhabitants of this world—to make this entire world God's sanctuary. The verse recited by Ashkenazic Jewish visitors to a house of mourning is, "May the Omnipresent (*ha-makom*) comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem." It is a prayer for the future, that the time will come when the Shekhinah will be ever-present, and then even this world will be a place of consolation and salvation, as I will discuss below.

Rosh Hashanah: Our Coronation of God as Sovereign as We Repair and Perfect a Broken World

The sanctity of Rosh Hashanah is mainly related to sovereignty, to anointing God as Sovereign of the world: "It is taught that Rabbi Judah said in the name of Rabbi Akiva…On Rosh Hashanah, say before Me *malkhuyyot* (sovereignty), *zikhronot* (remembrances), and *shofarot* (blasts) to crown Me over you. How? Through the shofar." (B. Rosh Hashanah 16a) This sovereignty of God in the world is made explicit on Rosh Hashanah in the fourth blessing of the Amidah, concerning the holiness of the day (*k'dushaht ha-yom*): "Blessed are You…Sovereign over all the earth…" This coronation is a fulfillment of the need to bring God into the world, to induce immediate, immanent divinity. The purpose of blowing the *shofar* is for us to anoint God as sovereign; the *shofar* was traditionally used in ancient Israel for coronation ceremonies (see, e.g., 1 Kings 1:39). Hence, the Bible's reference to Rosh Hashanah as yom *t'ruah*, "a day of sounding the *shofar*" (Numbers 29:1), marks it as the day of God's coronation as Sovereign of the world—over the world from within the world. And the Hebrew word *t'ruah* would then refer to the exultant shouts that accompany and punctuate a coronation ceremony.

In contrast, a later discussion in the Talmud (B. Rosh Hashanah 33b) interprets yom *t'ruah* as a day of groaning or sobbing, based on the derivation of the word *t'ruah* from *ruaḥ*. Indeed, the Talmud queries whether the term is related to *ginnuḥei gannaḥ*, the broken groaning sighs known as the sh'varim tones, or to the broken, sobbing, wailing sounds known as the *t'ruah* tone, *y'lilei yalil*—or perhaps to both "sighing" and "wailing" together. If so, how can we reconcile a day of weeping and sighing, as this passage interprets *yom t'ruah*, with the idea of the day of God being crowned as Sovereign of the world?

The answer to this question is that as long as the presence of God is not felt in the world, as long as the world is far from being perfected under the sovereignty of God's name, the world is

indeed a "valley of tears." The midrash is tragically succinct: "God's name is not complete and God's throne is not complete…as long as Amalek is in the world" (Rashi to Exodus 17:16). In the words of Rabbi Simha Bunim of Przysucha (1765–1827), "There is nothing more broken than a broken heart."[13] This vision of an incomplete (and even broken) world is documented by a startling verse in Isaiah, which all too honestly depicts the world created by God: "Producer of light and Creator of darkness, the One who makes peace and creates evil—I am the Eternal, who makes all of these" (Isaiah 45:7). God created a world that contains evil as well as good, darkness as well as light, chaos as well as order. Our world is imperfect, incomplete, and broken. And this is the reason Rosh Hashanah is a day of wailing, weeping, and sighing: because of the chasm between our present reality and our anticipated vision, between what we now have and what we still yearn for.

For the bridge to unite vision with reality, we must return to the initial biblical reference to the Sabbath:

> Then the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their array. With the seventh day, God completed creative physical activity that had been performed; God rested on the seventh day from all the creative physical activity that had been performed. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God rested from all the creative physical activity that God had created to do. (Genesis 2:1–3)

The last few words, "God had created to do," are not clear; they seem somewhat superfluous. If these words are deleted, the passage would still make perfect sense. I would suggest that the phrase should be taken to mean, "God rested from all the activity that God had created, [leaving the rest] for *humankind* to do."[14] It is up to us to fill in the gap; it is up to us to complete the work God expects us to do. We must crown God as Sovereign of the world and we must perfect the world under the sovereignty of God's name, which is love and compassion, graciousness (unconditional love), patience, and lovingkindness (cf.

Exodus 34:5-6).[15] This is the essence of Rosh Hashanah: to translate our vision into reality by crowning God as Sovereign over the world, so that God will come down and be manifest in the world so that it may be perfected, completed. We must make the world a suitable sanctuary within which it will be comfortable for God to dwell; then God will be manifest within the world.

This is the essence of the second paragraph of the Aleinu, recited as part of Malkhuyyot on Rosh Hashanah: we must "remove idolatry from the earth…perfect the world (*l'takkein olam*) under the sovereignty of the Almighty, when all mortals will call upon Your name and all the wicked of the earth will turn to You…Everyone will accept the yoke of Your Sovereignty and You will rule over them speedily forever…" This is what coronating God means; this is the essence of taking a transcendent God from an exalted, supernal place and making God immanent in our present world.

The prophets[16] declare that we will eventually succeed in this task in historic time (*zikhronot*) and by means of the nations accepting our Torah teachings (*shofarot*). Hence Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar teaches that ultimately all the Gentiles will convert to Judaism (B. Berakhot 57b), and Maimonides suggests that in the messianic age everyone will return to the true religion (Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakhim 12:1). The nations will come to the Third Temple to accept our teaching of ethical monotheism, they will beat their swords into plowshares, and the world will be redeemed.

And it is this human empowerment and divine guarantee that caused the talmudic sages to add the triumphant *t'kiah* sound of victory to the mournful *t'ruah* sound of angst on Rosh Hashanah—the *t'kiah* that emanates from the Jubilee Year as a taste of redemption (Leviticus 25:9). Even more, our sages mandate two exultant *t'kiah* sounds to every broken *t'ruah* sound and insist that each individual *t'kiah* be at least as long as each individual *t'ruah*.[17] Our faith in our capacity to turn this vale of tears into a Garden of Eden is what makes Rosh Hashanah a festival of joy and gives us the optimism

to turn despair into directive, as we continue to work toward the exultant crescendo-climax of our as-yet unfinished symphony.

Shabbat, Sanctuary, and Sanctifying Human Beings

God created time so that we, in historic time, will become a light unto the nations, will meet God in special moments of time (our festivals), and will eventually bring about that long-awaited and anxiously-expected time that will be the day (or epoch) "that is entirely Shabbat," when all of time will be spent in rendezvous with the Divine. This is the *zikhronot* blessing that follows the *malkhuyyot* blessing on Rosh Hashanah: the sanctity of historic time when, in a redeemed world, every day will be Shabbat.

Likewise, in regard to the dimension of place, we long to fulfill God's command to "make a sanctuary for Me, so that I will dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8)—the world must become an extension of the sanctuary! According to Yehudah Halevi's *Kuzari*, the sanctuary symbolizes the world, which we must make worthy of the Divine Presence dwelling in its midst. We must transform the entire world into a sanctuary and we must elevate every day to the level of Shabbat, thus sanctifying the dimensions of space and time by bringing God into these realms. It was so that we could be God's partners in perfecting the world of space and time that we were created in the image of God and charged with perfecting the world.

There is No Sanctity Without Sacrifice

It is an obligation for us humans to sanctify space and time, and every act of sanctity requires sacrifice and commitment. According to Rabbi Isaac Luria ("the Holy Ari," 1534–1572), the great secret and foundation of the world's creation is *tzimtzum*, the diminution or contraction of God's self, as it were. Reflect: if God is wholly goodness, and if the world and all of humanity are emanations of that

divine goodness, then from whence did evil, darkness, emptiness and void, the serpential evil instinct, and hedonistic materialism develop?

The question I am posing is probably the most significant question posed to the religionist: from whence, and why, does an imperfect world—a world that admits an Auschwitz —emanate from a perfect God of love?

In the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf, when Moses is desperately seeking God's forgiveness for the nation, the greatest of all prophets asks to see God's glory (*kavod*), to glimpse (as much as is humanly possible) the definition of God's presence in the world. God responds with a second revelation at Sinai, expressing the Thirteen Attributes—the first of which is the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter ineffable name of God (*yod-hei-vav-hei*), which the talmudic sages interpret to mean the God of unconditional love, both before and after we sin, the God of love who is always open to forgiveness (Exodus 33:18 and 34:6; B. Rosh Hashanah 17b). Indeed, the very name YHVH may well mean "love": hav in Aramaic is the verb "to give," so that *hei-vav-hei*, or "givingness," may well be identified with lovingkindness (since the most obvious expression of love is the desire to give to one's beloved). And although *hav* and *ahavah* are spelled with the letter vet and YHVH is spelled with the letter vav, these two homophonous letters may sometimes be interchanged: note that *ta·avah*, "erotic desire," is written with a vav and *tei·avon*, "hungry appetite," is written with a vet, and yet they are considered cognate words! Hence YHVH is the God of forgiving love.

Rabbi Ḥayyim Vital maintains that the Almighty created the world because "it was necessary for God to be perfect in action and in the fulfillment of the divine names," and since love and compassion require others to whom to express love and compassion—love and compassion cannot exist in a vacuum—God created human beings, "other."[19] And that "other" had to be created with freedom of choice; if humans were totally controlled by God, were in actuality mere extensions of God, then divine love for humans would merely

be "self-love" on the part of the Divine—it would be devoid of a true "other." So God created human beings with the possibility of choosing to do even that which God would not have wanted them to do; God had to leave room in the world for humanity to be other, to choose other (see Genesis 1:26, and the commentary of Seforno ad loc.). Hence God practiced self-constriction (*tzimtzum*), as it were, limiting divine omnipotence, in order to leave room in the world where God was not, to leave room for evil in an imperfect world, to enable humanity to choose evil, to create free human beings who were not mere puppets or pawns but who could and must become full partners, "only a little lower than God, crowned with glory and honor" (Psalm 8:5)—who will eventually triumph over evil, and will perfect, complete, and repair a broken world.

God initially emanated a world within historical time which was an inextricable part of the Divine. God is the One who fills all worlds and all times, the All in the all. In an act of love and self-sacrifice, God restricted and contracted the divine Being in order to leave room in time and space for others (i.e., humans); the challenge is for those others to re-unite both time and space with the God who initially created them, by restoring the Ineffable Eternal One with the Shekhinah, Tiferet with Malkhut. We must bring God into world by extending the sanctuary to encompass the world, and we must bring God into time by transforming every day into Shabbat. This requires great human effort and sacrifice. We, too, in imitation of God's ways, will be required to limit and contract our individual materialistic desires and needs in order to leave room both for other people and for God. Sometimes this will entail even the ultimate sacrifice of our lives and the lives of our children—for the sake of the continuity of our nation and our religion, and for our mission as God's witnesses and a light unto the nations of the world. But God guarantees through the divine covenant that we will ultimately overcome the challenges and re-create a perfected world. This is the meaning of the final triumphant *t'kiah g'dolah* sounded on Rosh Hashanah and at the close of Yom Kippur.

This is the amazing connection between Shabbat and sanctuary: Shabbat is to the rest of the days what the sanctuary is to the rest of the world. Shabbat is a sanctuary in time, and the sanctuary is an oasis in world.[20]

God created an imperfect world in worldly time for us to live in and work in and develop in, even as God invites us to turn that world into a sanctuary for the Divine to live in with us—in our midst—once humanity becomes worthy; and God created time and history within the world, inviting us to redeem both time and history by effectuating an era that is wholly and holy Sabbath and redemption. In the messianic era, both time and space will be suffused and saturated with divine sanctity; there will be no suffering, no tragedies, no untimely deaths. At that time, God's great name will be magnified and sanctified in the world created in accordance with the divine will—that is, a will that demands that we, God's human partners, sanctify both time and the world by bringing God into both of these spheres (see Ezekiel 38:23). At that time, God's name will be complete and the divine contraction will be expanded by the immanent Divine Presence. At that time, when God will be omnipresent (*ha-makom*) and suffuse the world with the Divine Presence, every broken heart will be repaired and every mourning soul will be comforted. This is the significance of the Mourner's Kaddish and the formula with which Ashkenazic Jews comfort the mourners.

There is a fascinating dispute between two of the greatest figures of Hasidism, the Kotzker Rebbe and the Vorker Rebbe. The Vorker Rebbe would say that he preferred the *mitzvah* of *sukkah* over the *mitzvah* of taking the four species, because when we hold the four species we are holding sanctity, but when we put them down, the sanctity is gone. When we sit in the *sukkah*, however, we are being held by a sanctity we cannot put down; it is all around us. The Kotzker Rebbe responded that that was why he preferred the *mitzvah* of the Sabbath over the *sukkah*: one can leave the *sukkah* and walk out of sanctity, but one can never leave Shabbat!

However, I would argue that the issue is not so clear-cut. The sanctity of Shabbat can be broken: when a person transgresses Shabbat, when the peace of a Shabbat table is destroyed by an angry word or a malicious reference, then the individual *has* effectively walked out of Shabbat. Sanctity is always dependent on the thoughts and deeds of people. "Israel must keep Shabbat, making Shabbat in every generation, as an everlasting covenant" (Exodus 31:16). We must "make Shabbat," declaring the sanctity of the Sabbath in our spoken Kiddush in addition to God's own declaration, and in addition to the natural astronomical advent of the Sabbath at sunset on Friday evening. Shabbat must be felt in our lives and in our deeds. By observing Shabbat, we actually "create" a unique and special twenty-five-hour oasis—a sanctuary—in time, a blessed day different and distinct from every other day, which must be made into a model for every day.

A well-known midrash[21] describes how Noah partnered with Satan in planting the first vineyard. Satan killed a sheep and poured its blood on the earth, killed a lion and poured its blood on that same earth, killed a monkey and spilled its blood over that earth, and killed a pig and let its blood mingle with the bloody earth. From this blood-soaked earth, a grapevine sprouted. When one drinks wine, one first becomes mild and sleepy like a sheep; when one continues drinking, one then becomes as fierce as a lion; when one drinks still more, one frolics ridiculously as a monkey; and eventually, when one drinks to surfeit, one becomes repulsive and disgusting, like a pig.

The Talmud asks why wine is red, and responds that under the influence of red wine one may come to shed red blood; moreover, when one recalls how one has acted when drunk, one is ashamed, and one's face flushes red (B. Sanhedrin 71a).

In spite of all this, or perhaps because of all this, we make Kiddush over wine; we seek to sanctify even the most mundane, to bring God into every aspect of our lives, uplifting the most material into the most spiritual. We make a special blessing on wine, which concludes

with the words "who creates the fruit of the vine" rather than the expected "who creates the fruit of the tree," because of the special intensity of human labor that is required to bring forth wine from the fruit of the vine. The wine symbolizes that with hard work, humans are able to improve on nature; with hard work, one can improve on one's own human nature, bringing sanctity into every aspect of life. With sacrifice and commitment, humanity can perfect God's world, and can bring the Divine into every realm, sanctifying every space and every day.

A Talmudic Tale Proves the Sanctity of Immanence

In order to understand the concept of sanctity, it is important to study the talmudic story of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, one of the giants of the talmudic sages who escaped the Romans by hiding in a cave with his son for thirteen years (B. Shabbat 33b–34a). The mystics maintain that during this period he was gifted with the divine revelation that produced the sacred Zohar.

According to one approach by the sages, "The blessed Holy One looked at the Torah, and created the world" (B'reishit Rabbah 1:1)—that is, Torah (including the Oral Law) is none other than a transcendental literature that emanates from the sublime and supernal realm of the Divine. From this perspective, immersing oneself in Torah is essentially immersing oneself in non-physical, otherworldly engagements. Thus, involvement in Torah study came to be seen as a transcendent involvement, totally separated from this world.[22] From this perspective, the study of Torah is clearly an ethereal and spiritual enterprise, demanding disengagement from world; hence, the ultra-Orthodox yeshiva world, in Israel as well as in the Diaspora, might contrast the study of Torah with any secular study or pursuit, seeing the two as being totally incompatible. And since *talmud* torah *k'neged kullam*, "the study of Torah outweighs all other pursuits" (B. Shabbat 127a), the essence of sanctity must be seen as the antithesis of worldly occupations, studies, or engagements.

Let us examine the approach of Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai:

> Rabbi Judah, Rabbi Yossi, and Rabbi Shimon were sitting and studying, and Judah, a son of converts, was sitting near them. Rabbi Judah commenced [the discussion] by observing, "How fine are the works of this people [the Romans]! They have made marketplaces, they have built bridges, they have erected bath houses." Rabbi Yose was silent. Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai answered and said, "All that they have made, they made for themselves: they built marketplaces to set harlots in them, bath houses in which unnecessarily to pamper themselves, and bridges on which levy tolls for themselves." Then Judah, the son of converts, went and related their conversation, which reached the ears of the government. [The Roman government] decreed: "Judah, who exalted [us], shall be exalted; Yose, who was silent, shall be exiled to Sepphoris; Shimon, who reviled [our efforts], must be executed."
> He and his son went and hid themselves in the house of study, where his wife brought him bread and a jug of water for their meals. [But] when the decree became more severe he said to his son, "Women are of unstable temperament; she may be tortured and expose us." So they went and hid in a cave. A miracle occurred and a carob tree and water well were created for them.[23] They would strip their garments and sit up to their necks in sand. (B. Shabbat 33b)

It is interesting to note how the cave is depicted as a grave of sorts: they sat up to their necks, buried in sand.[24] In any case, they were cut off from the world. It would seem that for the author of this story, Torah isolated from the world is not a living Torah but is rather an impaired, estranged Torah; it is a living grave! The talmudic tale continues:

> The whole day they studied; when it was time for prayers they dressed, covered themselves, prayed, and then took off their garments again, so that their garments would not wear out.

> Thus they dwelt twelve years in the cave. Then Elijah came and stood at the entrance to the cave, exclaiming, "Who will inform the son of Yoḥai that the emperor is dead and his decree annulled?" So they emerged. Seeing a man plowing and sowing, they exclaimed in condemnation, "People such as this one forsake eternal life and engage in temporal life!" Whatever they cast their eyes upon was immediately burnt up. Thereupon a heavenly voice came forth and cried out, "Have you emerged to destroy My world? Return to your cave!" So they returned and dwelt there twelve more months, after which they exclaimed, "The punishment of the wicked in Gehenna is only twelve months long."

Apparently, their cave became harder and harder to bear, despite the great amounts of Torah they learned within it. By this point, even Rabbi Shimon was experiencing their isolation as Gehenna, hell—the abyss that the wicked experience after death.

> A heavenly voice then came forth and said, "Go forth from your cave!" Thus, they left the cave. Wherever Rabbi Elazar was wounded, Rabbi Shimon healed. He said him, "My son! You and I are all this world needs [for total involvement in study; let the rest of humanity work]." On the eve of the Sabbath before sunset they saw an old man holding two bundles of myrtle and running at twilight. "What are these for?" they asked him. "They are in honor of the Sabbath," he replied. "But should not one suffice for you?" they asked. [He replied to them]: "One is for 'Remember' and one for 'Observe.'" Said [Rabbi Shimon] to his son, "See how precious the commandments are for Israel!" Thus they were placated.

From here, it is clear that the lesson Rabbi Shimon learns from the old man is significant. But before we attempt to understand how Rabbi Shimon viewed the material world and what he gleaned from the old man's response, we must first recall Rabbi Shimon's worldview

prior to this encounter outside of the cave. There is a famous dispute between Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Ishmael regarding the *mitzvah* of Torah study (B. Berakhot 35a):

> It is taught: "And you shall gather in your grain" (Deuteronomy 11:14). What is to be learned from these words? Since it says, "This book of the Torah shall not leave your mouth, you shall meditate therein by day and by night" (Joshua 1:8), one might think that this injunction is to be taken literally. Therefore it says, "And you shall gather in your grain," which implies that you are to combine the study of Torah with a worldly occupation. This is the view of Rabbi Ishmael. Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai says: "Is that possible? If one plows in the plowing season, sows in the sowing season, reaps in the reaping season, threshes in the threshing season, and winnows in the season of wind, what is to become of Torah study? Rather, when Israel performs the will of the Omnipresent, their work is performed by others, as it says: 'And strangers [Gentiles] shall stand and feed your flocks' (Isaiah 61:5). And when Israel does not perform the will of the Omnipresent [to study Torah full-time], they will carry out their work themselves, as it says, 'And you shall gather in your grain' (Deuteronomy 11:14). Nor is this all, but the work of others will also be done [by the Israelites]."

It would seem to be clear according to Rabbi Shimon that the ideal is indeed to literally learn Torah "all day and all night"—all of the time! And our material needs will then be taken care of by others.

It is interesting to note that in the subsequent talmudic passage, where the difference of opinion between Rabbi Shimon and Rabbi Ishmael is adjudicated, no one in the later generation of sages agrees with the opinion of Rabbi Shimon—neither Abaye nor Rava nor Rabbah: "Said Abaye: Many have followed the advice of Rabbi Ishmael, and it has worked well; others have followed Rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai and it has not worked well. Rabbah said to the sages who

studied in his academy: I would ask you not to appear before me [in the house of study] during Nisan and Tishrei, in order that you may be able to do the necessary agricultural work so that you will not be anxious about your food supply during the rest of the year."

It would seem that Rabbi Shimon's approach was deemed to be not realistic. Those who followed his conviction of total immersion in Torah study found themselves waiting in vain; "others" never appeared to do their work for them. Moreover, Rabbi Shimon's maximalist interpretation of meditating in Torah "all day and all night" (*yomam va-lailah*) would seem to contradict the universally accepted maxim, "It is good to combine Torah study with a worldly occupation" (Pirkei Avot 2:2). Even more importantly, Rabbi Shimon's strongly worded opinion in this passage seems to contradict another of Rabbi Shimon's own statements: "Rabbi Yoḥanan said in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, 'If one only recites the Shema prayer in the morning and the evening, one has fulfilled the commandment of 'This book of the Torah shall not leave your mouth'—[meaning:] you shall meditate therein for a *portion* of the day and a *portion* of the night'" (B. Menaḥot 99b). And similarly, we read in the Mekhilta, on the verse "Six days you shall labor and do all your work" (Exodus 20:9): Rabbi Shimon says, "Work is so important that even if the high priest were to enter the holy of holies on Yom Kippur not as part of the service, he would receive the death penalty; whereas when the Temple was being built, even unclean workers or people with defects were allowed to enter the holy of holies." Even more startlingly, in another version of the same Mekhilta passage just cited, we read: "Rabbi Shimon teaches that 'Six days you shall labor'—this is a positive commandment. It is incumbent for one to work during the week in order for it be recognizable that one is resting on the Sabbath."[25]

All of these texts show the great value that Rabbi Shimon places on work and worldly occupation. Clearly, he must have changed his mind; but if so, can we find a clue as to when and why?

This contradiction can be resolved by reflecting upon the transformation that Rabbi Shimon had undergone by the second time he left the cave. Earlier in his life, he had seen Torah study and any other non-Torah involvement as being mutually contradictory, since any such endeavor would remove the scholar from his single-minded commitment to study Torah. He believed that "If one plows in the plowing season, sows in the sowing season, reaps in the reaping season, threshes in the threshing season, and winnows in the season of wind, what is to become of Torah study?" However, by the time he reemerged from the cave, he had come to view Torah study in a different light. The Shulḥan Arukh comments that Rabbi Shimon left the cave on the thirty-third day of the counting of the omer,[26] a day which came to be marked as a festival on the Jewish calendar. Note that for twelve years, Rabbi Shimon (together with his son) had been immersed in the secrets of the Kabbalah. According to kabbalistic tradition, he was divinely inspired at that time to write the sacred Zohar. However, because he was completely isolated, in a sense he was dead to the world; having been forced to escape the earthly world, his experience in the cave was otherworldly. As we have discussed, this withdrawal is problematic: humanity's challenge is to sanctify *this* world, the world we live in, and not to seek holiness through complete denial of the material world. We must transform this world into the world to come.

This was understood by Rabbi Akiva's students, who fought in the revolt of Bar Kokhba in order to free the land of Israel and bring redemption to the world. They were not content to learn Torah and pray; rather, they took action! They died at the hands of the Sicarii—not by a form of whooping cough (as Rashi understands the talmudic term *ask'ra*), but rather by the sword, as Rabbi Hai Gaon describes: "The students of Rabbi Akiva died by *sh'mada*, having been murdered as a result of the harsh edicts of the Roman Emperor Hadrian, which were related to the revolt of Bar Kokhba."[27]

This is the moral of the old man running at sunset with two myrtle branches, one branch symbolizing the "remembrance" (preparation

for) Shabbat and the other symbolizing the "observance" of Shabbat. We have seen that Shabbat is a testimony to the creation of an incomplete world, a broken world. However, Shabbat is also a taste of the world to come, an encounter between this incomplete world and the world to come, perfect and redeemed. During the week, the six days of creation, we need to elevate the real world, our world, into a foretaste of the world to come, a time that is entirely Shabbat. Therefore, we "remember the Shabbat day" during the week, and prepare for our dream to "observe the Shabbat day" on Shabbat itself. In this way we can live in both worlds at the same time; even in our imperfect world, we can catch a glimpse of the world of the future at least every Sabbath day. We can appreciate the disparity between where we are and where we yearn to be and, at the same time, prepare for a more glorious future. And preparing for the Messiah must be seen in itself as a holy pursuit; the effort that goes into bringing God into the world may well be considered a higher rung of sanctity than the passive realization that the Messiah is here. In halakhic terminology, *hekh·sheir mitzvah* is also a *mitzvah*.

How do we prepare for this during the week? By creating sanctity, by performing *mitzvot* in the material world, by elevating that which is worldly, physical, material. Through plowing and planting—by keeping the laws of tithing (*t'rumot* and *ma·asrot*), by not planting forbidden mixtures, by "not restraining the oxen when they plow," by leaving a corner of the field for the poor. And by observing the laws that are pertinent to every part of life: charity laws, laws within the home, laws between neighbors, laws of family purity, laws of *kashrut*. These are the laws that sanctify every aspect of life: commerce, community, life, eating, intimacy. We can reach toward sanctity through our daily lives, through living in this world, not by escaping it—and by preparing every aspect of our lives in the not-yet-holy world for when we will merit the holy world. And even then we will no doubt still be struggling to rise higher and higher in sanctity.[28]

This is precisely what Rabbi Shimon learned from the old man with the two myrtle twigs. He even said to his son, "See how

precious the commandments are for Israel"; the observation that "they were placated" indicates that they then understood the value of agricultural pursuit. The commandments require us to be involved in and to engage with this world, in every aspect of our being. That is how we prepare the way for the re-creation of a more perfect world.

If wine can be sanctified, then there is nothing in the material world that cannot similarly be made holy. As Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook teaches: in this world there are only two categories, the holy and the not-yet holy. There is no unredeemable material, nothing that is wholly *ḥol*: "And God saw everything that had been made, and it was good"—at least in potential. We are entrusted with the task of sanctifying everything in this world.

The same applies to time. Every day is holy, for the same God who created Shabbat also created the six days leading up to it. As we say in our prayers, "God who, in goodness, renews the act of creation every single day." We must recognize the potential in every moment of every day—after all, for six days we must do our work, which is holy in itself, since the preparation for a *mitzvah* is also a *mitzvah*. A person must sanctify every material object,[29] making every moment holy and every place heavenly. This is the lesson that the old man taught Rabbi Shimon: even a branch of myrtle, and even the act of plowing or planting, can be holy—for they are inseparable parts of remembering the Shabbat day to keep it holy, and observing the Shabbat day to keep it holy. They are all preparations for the period that is wholly Shabbat and for the world-sanctuary that will host God within it and within our midst.

The Myrtle: Blooming Even in a Wasteland, a Symbol of Redemption

This is symbolized by the myrtle. The myrtle is mentioned as one of the seven plants that will cause the wasteland to bloom in the time of redemption: "I will put in the desert cedar and acacia,

myrtle and olive; I will place in the wasteland cypress, fir, and the box tree together" (Isaiah 41:19). There is a custom (attributed to Rabbi Ḥayyim Vital)—a custom that I myself maintain in my home—to welcome Shabbat on Friday evening by making a blessing on two myrtle branches right before blessing the children, paralleling the blessings on the spices recited Saturday evening at Havdalah.

Myrtle is one of the four species that we bind together on Sukkot, and we then wave the bundle in every direction when we recite Hallel. In the book of Nehemiah we read that myrtle was even used in the actual construction of the *sukkah*: "Go out to the mountain and bring olive branches, oil tree branches, myrtle branches, date branches, and shade tree branches to build a *sukkah*, as it is written" (Nehemiah 8:15). Queen Esther, who redeems herself and the lives of her people after spending her years of growth and development in the pagan hedonistic environment of Persia, nevertheless, at a critical moment, rejoins her Jewish past and secures a Jewish future for herself and her Jewish people. Her Hebrew name is Hadassah, "myrtle"; her Jewishness bloomed in the pagan desert of Persia.

According to the Talmud, all parts of the myrtle tree—its leaves, its branches, and its fruit—taste the same, as in the beginning of creation in the Garden of Eden. It is written: "They said that Rabbi Judah bar Ilai would take a myrtle wand and dance before the bride, saying that the bride is beautiful and graceful" (B. Ketubot 17a). And it is clear from the wedding blessings that every wedding has an aspect of redemption, of faith in the future of Israel, resonating with the wish that there "may be heard in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem the sounds of joy and gladness, the sounds of the bridegroom and bride." In a similar vein, it is written that "whoever learns Torah and teaches it in a place devoid of Torah scholars is like a beloved myrtle in the wilderness" (B. Rosh Hashanah 23a)—that is, the myrtle even blossoms in a wasteland. God must be brought unto wherever the Divine Presence is lacking. Similarly, God commanded Abraham: "Walk before Me and be whole-hearted" (Genesis 17:1); and in the prophet's words, "A voice calls out in the desert:

'Make way for the Eternal, clear a path through the wilderness for our God!'" (Isaiah 40:3). A myrtle in the wilderness symbolizes the introduction of holiness into a not-yet holy place. Myrtle is a symbol of the challenge—and the possibility—of bringing redemption to this world.

This is what Rabbi Shimon saw in the myrtle branches the old man was carrying on Shabbat eve. Sanctity can only radiate in all its glory outside of the cave, for only when it shines *outside* of the cave can it reach and illuminate every corner of the world. We must not despair, but strive to sanctify even the most desolate and most godless of places.

Coins, Baths, and Marketplaces: All Potentially Holy

But to truly understand the full meaning of sanctity, we must continue exploring the wondrous tale of Rabbi Shimon and what happened to him after leaving the cave: "Since a miracle has occurred, he said, 'Let me go and fix [*atakkein*, using a word based on the three-letter root *tav-kof-nun*] something, for it is written, *And Jacob came whole* [*to the city of Shechem*] (Genesis 33:18)'." The parallel is clear. Like Jacob, who struggled with Esau and triumphed, so did Rabbi Shimon struggle with Esau's descendant, Edom/Rome. He too triumphed, and he emerged whole:

> As Rav interpreted: whole in body, whole in finances, and whole in Torah. And [Jacob] gave graciously [*va-yiḥan*] to the city, and thereby perfected [i.e., fixed] it significantly. [How so?] Rav said: He instituted coinage for them. Samuel said: He instituted market for them. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: He instituted bath houses for them. (B. Shabbat 33b)

Rabbi Shimon now understood that out of gratitude for God's salvation, he too must actively sanctify aspects of this world, as he learns from our ancestor Jacob. And is it not amazing that precisely

those three aspects of Roman society that Rabbi Shimon had reviled at the beginning of our narrative—those were precisely the three things that Grandfather Jacob/Israel had perfected for God! Apparently coins, bath-houses, and marketplaces may become sources of evil and hedonistic materialism, or they may be seen as means to attain societal economic well-being—allowing for the growth of businesses to provide gainful occupation, as well as institutions of hygienic welfare, which allow citizens to maintain sound minds in sound bodies. The Romans developed these institutions to be hotbeds of corruption and immorality; for Jacob, these very same institutions were used as a boon, serving to help repair and perfect society. Rabbi Shimon had indeed become transformed; he no longer saw Torah in opposition to the world, but rather as the means to sanctifying world. The story concludes:

> Rabbi Shimon asked them [the leaders]: "Is there anything that needs fixing, that is in need of repair?" They replied: "There is a place of questionable purity, which has been marked impure by priests, who avoid going there." He said: "Are there people who can vouch for the fact that at one time it had been considered pure?" One old man answered: "Ben Zakkai used to gather lupines here [which must be kept pure; that is, he testified that at one time the area had been pure]." According to this information, every hard place he declared pure; and every soft place he declared impure. [Apparently, the hardness of the ground was a sign that no one had been buried there] (B. Shabbat 33b–34a).

Rabbi Shimon found a large parcel of land that was avoided—especially by priests—because it was of questionable purity, because at least a portion of it had been used as a cemetery. Unfortunately the entire area was now considered impure and rendered off-limits to priests, the teachers of Torah. Rabbi Shimon effectuated his *tikkun*, or repair, by declaring a goodly portion of the area pure and therefore permissible for priests.

Recall that the initial image of the cave—where Rabbi Shimon had fled to—seemed to be that of a cemetery, with Rabbi Shimon and his son buried up to their necks in the sand while they learned Torah (and later, the cave is compared to Gehenna, hell). The symbolism here is striking: Torah in a cave, isolated from world, is a cemetery, a gravesite. However, our Torah is a Torah of life, a Torah by which we must live and not die, a Torah that urges us to "choose life," a Torah that is a "tree of life for all who grasp it" (Proverbs 3:18). It is a Torah that is meant for this world, the world of the living: a Torah that must perfect and sanctify this world, a Torah that must bring God into this world—the living God who wants us to live and not die, the God who is the Sovereign of all living creatures, the God whose greatest praise is in making the dead live again.

Hence Rabbi Shimon's *tikkun*, of the place as well as of himself, was to bring the Torah of the priest to a place where it had been prevented from being, to a place that had moved outside of the world of the living. Rabbi Shimon thus brought the God of life, through the Torah of life, into an area that he had restored from land-of-the-dead to land-of-the-living. This is the truest function of Torah.

The Annual Festivals: The Sanctity of Time

I now wish to return to our discussion of the festivals and our questions regarding the biblical passage in which they first appear together. The first month of the Jewish calendar is Nisan, in which we celebrate the festival of Pesah, which is followed by the counting of the *omer* until Shavuot, seven weeks later. This is a period of the gestation and birth of a nation: both physically, in our exodus from Egyptian slavery to freedom, and spiritually and morally, in the revelation at Sinai. The Torah thus defines the nation of Israel as a people who believes in freedom and the responsibility of freedom, the necessity of linking the freedom of Passover to the ethical laws of the revelation of the Decalogue at Sinai. Freedom dare not be an excuse for lawlessness, for looting and rioting and raping. Freedom under God is a freedom

with responsibility: *ḥeirut* with *aḥrayut*. But at this point, during the first three months of the year (Nisan with Passover, Iyar with its *omer*-count, and Sivan with Shavuot), the responsibility is limited to the Jewish nation. Passover is a familial or national celebration, with a lamb for each household and the exclusion of all uncircumcised males (Exodus 12:3, 6, 43–48).

Rosh Hashanah, the next festival in line, occurs during the seventh month (Tishrei), and extends the responsibility for nation to the responsibility for world. Rosh Hashanah is a commemoration of the birthday of the world (albeit a broken, imperfect, and incomplete world), a world symbolized by the *t'ruah* sound of the *shofar*. One of the most prominent pieces of the Rosh Hashanah liturgy is the Aleinu prayer (including the *al kein n'kaveh l'kha* paragraph), which emphasizes God's sovereignty while insisting upon the mission of Israel to "perfect the world under the sovereignty of God's name," to repair and heal the broken world, to transform the *t'ruah* into a *t'kiah*. Hence Aleinu is the first blessing of the Rosh Hashanah Musaf liturgy extolling God's universal sovereignty, *malkhuyyot*. Once our nation has developed and matured from its Pesah and Shavuot origins, it must begin to accept the yoke of universal responsibility.

This is analogous to a baby, who thinks that the entire world revolves around him or her, and that it is the sole object of its parents' love. Rosh Hashanah teaches that from the womb of the Shekhinah come innumerable siblings of various colors and ethnic backgrounds, all born in the image of God, all with the DNA of all members of the Divine Nature Association. It is the image of God that makes us each free and inviolate, all indelibly linked together as children beloved to our universal, even cosmic, Parent.

Hence we have two epicenters of the year. In the first month, Nisan, there is the festival that marks the creation of a nation: Pesaḥ. Through the *omer* it is linked to the third month, Sivan, containing the festival that completes the Passover freedom by bringing us from the desert to our homeland, Israel, with the celebration of

the first fruits in the Temple. Counting the *omer* takes us from the offering of barley (animal grains) to the offering of wheat (human grains) seven weeks later, and Shavuot commemorates our spiritual freedom through the Torah we received at Sinai, our Divine National Constitution. These festivals define the Jewish nation: its homeland, its values, and its lifestyle.

The second epicenter occurs in the seventh month (which is parallel to the seventh day, Shabbat): the month of Tishrei, which begins with Rosh Hashanah and continues with Yom Kippur, Sukkot, and Shemini Atzeret. This is the universal epicenter of the year, and Rosh Hashanah, the birthday of the world, defines the purpose and mission of the nation Israel in the world: to perfect the world under the sovereignty of God's name. Rosh Hashanah culminates in Yom Kippur, during which Judaism's mission is repeated over and over in the Seliḥot penitential prayers: "for My house [i.e., sanctuary] shall be called a house of prayer *for all nations*." On Rosh Hashanah Israel has a rendezvous with God which enables the entire nation to be present at the creation of the world and which commands and empowers them to engage and teach the world: "Through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed."[30] Hence Rosh Hashanah is called *shabbaton* (Leviticus 23:24), linking it to the universal Sabbath with which this entire biblical passage of the festivals opens. Passover and Shavuot, national festivals, are not called *shabbaton*.

On Yom Kippur, the nation of Israel meets God not only in time—commemorating the day when God is defined as a God of love and unconditional forgiveness, recalling the day when God forgave the nation for their idolatrous sin with the golden calf by giving the second set of tablets—but also in space, in the sacred sanctuary, which we pray is to be expanded to encompass all the nations of the world. Indeed, the entire world must become a sanctuary, a house of prayer (enabling communication with the Divine) for all the families of the earth (Isaiah 56:7, repeated again and again in the Yom Kippur liturgy).

Yom Kippur is *shabbat shabbaton* (Leviticus 23:32): first, because it enables human beings to re-create themselves through repentance and God's forgiveness; and second, because it broadens the sanctity of space as well as of time, when the Israelites are bidden by God to enlarge the sanctuary to encompass all of humanity, to host the Divine in their midst.

The Festival of Sukkot: A Festival of National and Universal Significance

The festival of Sukkot contains two aspects, with dual significance. On the one hand, it is part of a trilogy of events that transformed a group of shepherds and slaves into a proud nation. This historicity connects the festival of Sukkot to Pesaḥ and Shavuot and emphasizes, from a national point of view, that we have emerged triumphant despite the endless exiles and persecution we have faced. The impermanence of the *sukkah* itself reflects how, despite the harsh and hostile environments threatening the fragile and fleeting structure, the *sukkah* hut-house of Israel has nevertheless not only survived, but has even survived as a holy people. This national aspect of Sukkot—similar to Passover-Shavuot—is not described with the word *shabbaton*: "And the Eternal spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the Israelites, saying: On the fifteenth day of this seventh month is the festival of Sukkot, seven days for the Eternal'" (Leviticus 23:24).

This aspect of the festival is followed with a general statement that summarizes the end of the annual cycle of festivals, and the three festivals of pilgrimage in particular: "These are the Eternal's appointed festivals, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies" (Leviticus 23:37). In each of these three festivals, we have had a special and sacred "meeting" with the Divine. On Passover, God chose us as a special and firstborn child and redeemed us from slavery. On Shavuot, God gave us the Torah, which we freely accepted. And on Sukkot, God confirmed that despite exile from host countries and persecutions from pillar to post, we have survived; God remains our national Protector.

But there is further significance to the festival of Sukkot. Sukkot is not only part of the Pesaḥ-Shavuot-Sukkot triad, the national festivals of pilgrimage, but it is also related to Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the special days of universal significance. Logically, given the sojourning in the desert that it commemorates, Sukkot would have been more suitably placed in Nisan, between Pesaḥ and Shavuot, right after the Exodus from Egypt. However, Sukkot falls in Tishrei, only days after the High Holy Days. From this perspective, the *sukkah* celebrated is "the fallen tabernacle (*sukkah*) of David," the sanctuary-tabernacle that is built in the wake of Yom Kippur, symbolizing the ultimate dwelling place of God in the midst of the world: a house of prayer to all nations. Such a sanctuary does not require proud, strong walls for protection, because it represents the Temple in the period of world peace. It requires the presence of the Almighty, the sheltering shadow of divine love, and the *ushpizin* (guests) who conveyed Torah teachings throughout the generations.

And then the biblical text moves on to the second aspect of the festival of Sukkot, the commandment to take the four species, the universal bounty that symbolizes God's gifts of heaven, earth and rain, to provide sustenance for all—but not without the human input to work the land agriculturally: "So beginning with the fifteenth day of the seventh month, after you have gathered the crops of the land, celebrate the festival to the Eternal for seven days; the first day is a *shabbaton* and the eighth day is also a *shabbaton*" (Leviticus 23:39).

Here, the ingathering of the crops is featured—for Sukkot occurs during the universal harvest-time—and the word *shabbaton* also reveals the universal, supra-national nature of the festival. Here, sanctity of time and sanctity of place intersect, for all gathering of crops—indeed, all raising of crops—is holy. The entire land is holy, and all time spent in the field—planting, plowing, reaping, and threshing—is holy. This holiness is reflected in the manner in which we work the fields: allowing the land to lie fallow every seventh year, not mixing different kinds of seeds together, not yoking an ox to an ass and forcing them to plow together (despite their very different strengths), leaving for the poor both the forgotten sheaves and a

designated corner of the field. And it is also reflected in the manner in which we reap: sharing sustenance with the indigent, with the priests, and with the landless Levites, in a sacred partnership with God in nourishing humanity.

Hence, this second mention of Sukkot also specifies the four species: "On the first day you are to take a beautiful fruit of a tree (*p'ri eitz hadar*), palm branches, a leafy myrtle branch, and a willow sprig" (Leviticus 23:40)—items that symbolize the universal fruits of Mother Earth. And these are also fruits that symbolize the universal need for rain, *geshem*; the universal need for the material world, *gashmiyut*; and the universal relationship between rainfall from heaven, human agricultural ingenuity, and hard labor in tilling the soil most effectively—a universal partnership between God and humanity. We must be grateful for and desperately concerned about the food supply for all of humanity.

Not only is the *land* of Israel connected to the world through the universal act of working the earth, but the *nation* of Israel must also be connected to the world, extending the sanctity of Israel and its holiest city, Jerusalem, to all lands and cities of the world, being a light unto the nations as witnesses of God and divine compassionate righteousness, just morality, and peace. These universal festivals stress the interrelationship between all nations—especially important in a global village as we have today. It is therefore symbolic that over the course of the Sukkot festival, Israel must bring seventy bulls as offerings on behalf of the seventy nations of the world.

Following these verses, the commandment of dwelling in a *sukkah* is also repeated, only this time, with the addition of a rationale: "… so that your descendants will know that I had the Israelites live in booths when I brought them out of Egypt" (Leviticus 23:43). The Exodus from Egypt was a public announcement to the entire world that enslavement, tyranny, and totalitarianism are appalling sins. God alone may rule over the whole world. And we, Israel, must always be ready to raise the banner of freedom as part of our blessing for all the families of the earth; God is Owner of heaven and earth, and under

God every individual created in the divine image must be free and inviolate.

Shemini Atzeret, the "Eighth Day of Assembly," is an added gathering: the gathering of the entire world as one. This is the very symbolism behind the offering of a single bull on this day. The festival is marked by prayers for rain from the Universal Fructifier and, as it has developed through the generations, is also a gala celebration of the Torah. It is on this day that we take the Torah to the streets, singing and dancing with the Torah scrolls, and we even invite Gentile leaders to celebrate with us. On Simhat Torah[31] we conclude our yearly reading of the Torah and begin once again the book of Genesis—and the story of creation. This is a fitting climax to the universalism of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, to the sanctity of God within the world. On Shemini Atzeret–Simḥat Torah, we bring God's Torah to the world!

And therefore, in the second passage, Sukkot is twice called a shabbaton—once for the *sukkah*-sanctuary and then again for the universal Torah, the Torah for the world.

If So, What Is Sanctity?

Israel's mission is to bring God into this world and to cause God to dwell within the dimension of time and history, thus bringing redemption and the messianic era. From the very moment that God elected Abraham, God charged him, saying: "I shall make you a great nation, and through you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Sanctity requires humanity's constant effort, and God's partnership, in order to perfect the world in the name of God's sovereignty. This is the fundamental essence of the festivals, the fundamental mission of Judaism, and the fundamental definition of sanctity. We must join forces with God in order to create a world that is entirely sanctuary, and to create a time that is entirely Shabbat. In short, the sanctity of time and the sanctity of place ultimately depend

on the sanctity of Israel and the sanctity of the rest of humanity: we, to teach our God-given Torah; and they, to accept it. At that time, in the words of the Aleinu, "everyone will accept the yoke of divine sovereignty," and "at that time the Eternal shall be One and God's name shall be One." What is the essence of Torah, and what is its most profound message? If we are to suffuse God throughout the world, what is that spirituality that we are spreading round about? Listen to the prophet Jeremiah, the message the sages of the Talmud taught on Tishah B'Av when we are to think of redeeming the world and re-building the holy Temple; hear the last words of Maimonides at the conclusion of his final work, the *Guide for the Perplexed*: "Thus says the Eternal: Let not the wise glorify themselves with their wisdom, let not the strong glorify themselves with their strength, and let not the rich glorify themselves with their riches. But only with this shall one glorify oneself and be glorified: understanding and knowing Me, for I am the Eternal who does lovingkindness, moral justice, and compassionate righteousness on earth; it is these things which are My desire, says the Eternal" (Jeremiah 9:22–23).

NOTES

[1] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983).
[2] Published in Gesher, Student Organization of Yeshiva (Sivan 5728/June 1966).
[3] *Macbeth*, act V, scene 5.
[4] Ibid.
[5] See Rashi to Genesis 2:3: God created *m'nuḥah* (rest) on the seventh day (and cf. *Musaf Rashi*, ad loc.: God desired completion, *ḥemdah*).
[6] See B. Sotah 14a: "Just as God is compassionate, so must you be compassionate; just as God clothes the naked, so must you clothe the naked…"
[7] Originally published in 1917 in German, it was first translated into English in 1923 and has appeared in many editions since then.
[8] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1957).
[9] This idea is adapted from Abraham Joshua Heschel's *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951).
[10] *Guide for the Perplexed* I 64.
[11] See Radak (Radak David Kimḥi) to Ezekiel 3:12, whose interpretation is in line with my grammatical construction. Radak maintains that *barukh* means "additional goodness and blessing"; he explains the phrase to mean that the immanent glory of God in the world is greater that it had been when it had been merely located between the two cherubs of the desert sanctuary—i.e., that God's glory when manifested throughout the world is greater that the ethereal glory manifested in the heavens above and beyond (and the angelic cherubs symbolize the supernally and transcendentally sacred).
[12] See Abudraham to this passage for a similar explanation.
[13] *Kol Ha-m'vasseir*, vol. 1, p. 287.
[14] See the midrash cited in Kasher's *Torah Sh'leimah* to this verse.
[15] For more about the divine names and the qualities they embody, see the essay elsewhere in this volume by Saul Berman.
[16] See, e.g., Isaiah 2, Micah 4, and Zechariah 7–9.
[17] M. Rosh Hashanah 4:10; B. Rosh Hashanah 32b, and see Tosafot ad loc.
[18] See Maimonides' explanation of the *kavod* in his Guide I 64.
[19] *Sha·ar Ha-hakdamot*, *sha·ar* 1, *hakdamah* 3.
[20] Hence the various biblical connections between the Sabbath and the sanctaruy, c.f., e.g., Exodus 31:13 and Leviticus 19:30. See Avishai David, *Soloveitchik* on the *Parashah*, *Va-yak·heil*, and the linguistic use of *m'lakhah* and *va-y'khulu* found in both of these biblical texts.
[21] *Tanḥuma*, *No·ah* §13.
[22] See the opening phrase of Rav Soloveitchik's *Halakhic Man*: "The Holy One, blessed be He, looked into the Torah and the created the world"; as well as the

adage oft-stated in the book, *halakhah v'lo ma·aseh*, theoretical study definitely not for practical application. See also *Nefesh Ha-ḥayyim* by Rabbi Ḥayyim Volozhin.

[23] A carob tree and a stream of water are the two miracles brought in an earlier talmudic debate (B. Bava Metzia 59b) to prove that the *halakhah* is according to Rabbi Eliezer and not according to Rabbi Joshua in the matter concerning a type of oven; Rabbi Eliezer believed that the Torah is still in heaven, that the halakhic ruling is still determined by God, and that the Torah is therefore transcendent. However, the Talmud concludes that this is not the case, and the miracles Rabbi Eliezer performed with a carob tree and a stream of water do not prove that the *halakhah* is in the hands of God. Rather, as expounded by Rabbi Joshua, the Torah is not in heaven but rather on earth, within our reach.

[24] Recall that the grave of our ancestors is called the Cave of Machpelah.

[25] Amos Hakham, *Daat Mikra* to Exodus 20:8, p. 384. Cf. also Mekhilta D'rabbi Shimon bar Yoḥai, ibid., p.149.

[26] In its discussion of laws pertaining to the festival of Lag Ba-Omer; see S.A. Oraḥ Ḥayim 93:7.

[27] See Y. Taanit 4:6.

[28] See Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Melakhim 12:5.

[29] Note that the Hebrew word for material, *ḥomer*, is similar to the Aramaic word for wine, *ḥamar*.

[30] Genesis 12:3; these are God's words to Abraham at the time of his election.

[31] In Israel, Simḥat Torah is celebrated together with Shemini Atzeret; outside of Israel, it is celebrated on the following day.