

**The Holiness of God:  
Its Meaning, Actualization, and Symbolic Embodiment**

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Seven separate times in the Torah, God is identified by saying “I, the Eternal your God, am holy (*kadosh*).” Religious thinkers and scholars have expended much effort and ink in attempting to explain the meaning of the word *kadosh* in this context, as well as in the multitude of other passages in which the word is used in the Torah. This essay is an attempt at a modest additional contribution to the prior literature on this matter.<sup>1</sup> The central focus of this article will be on the usage of term *kadosh*/holy in the text of the Torah, in order to elicit the patterns of its use as a way of arriving at a systematic understanding of its meaning. But throughout the article I will integrate rabbinic teachings, to explicate biblical usages and to demonstrate application of those usages within Jewish thought and law.

The urgency of understanding the meaning of the term *kadosh* derives first from the fact that God is cited as using that quality more frequently than any other characteristic to describe the divine self. Since imitating God is itself a command that necessitates an understanding of the nature and qualities of the Divine, it would be a forfeiture of significant dimension for us to lack understanding of the term. Second, the Torah also uses the word *kadosh* to describe a broad series of other entities in the divergent realms of time, persons, objects, and places. Those latter references are not random, but appear in coherent parallel sets. It is to these sets that we will then turn our attention, as a way of evaluating the ways in which *k'dushah* (holiness) is embodied in these symbolic vessels.

### The Meaning of the Holiness of God

While the Torah contains many self-proclamations of God's own holiness and a broad range of entities are seen to embody the notion of holiness, the text of the Torah contains only intimations of the essential meaning of the term. Let us trace a line of reasoning in verses of the Torah that might lead us to one possible meaning of the term "holiness."

In Leviticus 19:2, God demands of the Jewish nation: "You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy." This verse implies that the very holiness of God can be discovered in its echo in the holiness of the Jewish people. In what, then, does their holiness reside?

Deuteronomy 28:9–10 sheds more light on the idea of the holiness of the Jewish people: "The Eternal will establish you as a holy people, as God has sworn unto you, if you will keep the commandments of the Eternal your God and walk in God's ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Eternal is called upon you, and they shall be in awe of you" (Deuteronomy 28:9–10). The meaning of *k'dushah* here is unequivocal. The holiness of the Jewish people is actualized through two realms of conduct: observance of the divine commandments and walking in God's ways.

These two components, which constitute the essential character of the holiness of the Jewish people, is indicated as well in a prior passage in Deuteronomy, where Moses confirms the people's entry into an eternal, mutual covenant with God: "You have acknowledged this day the Eternal to be your God, in that you would walk in God's ways and keep God's statutes and commandments and ordinances, and hearken unto God's voice. And the Eternal has acknowledged you this day to be God's own treasure...that you may be a holy people unto the Eternal your God, as God has spoken" (Deuteronomy 26:17–19). Here, as in the preceding passage, the holiness of the Jewish people appears to be actualized in the same two components: obedience to the law and walking in God's ways. The former component is quite clear, but what exactly is meant by "walking in God's ways"?

Let us return now to Deuteronomy 28:10, where Moses describes the extraordinary consequences, the impact, of the perception that the Jewish people is holy: “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Eternal is called upon you, and they shall be in awe of you.” The simple meaning of this verse is that when the nations of the world perceive the holiness of the Jewish people, they will sense that the very name of God is actualized within the Jews, and therefore they—those other nations—will experience awe. What, then, is the connection between holiness and the name of God?

The verses above have taught us that one of the central components of achieving holiness is “walking in the ways of God.” Writing about this commandment, Maimonides says:

The eighth *mitzvah* is that we are commanded to emulate blessed God to the best of our ability. The source of this commandment is God’s statement...“And you shall walk in God’s ways” (Deuteronomy 28:9). This commandment is repeated in the verse, “to walk in all of God’s ways” (Deuteronomy 11:22). This is explained in the words of the Sifrei (Eikev): “Just as God is called merciful, so too you must be merciful. Just as God is called kind, so too you must be kind. Just as God is called righteous, so too you must be righteous. Just as God is called pious, so too you must be pious.” This commandment is also repeated in the verse, “Walk after the Eternal your God” (Deuteronomy 13:5). This too is explained as emulating the good deeds and fine attributes that are used to allegorically describe our exalted God, who is immeasurably exalted over everything.<sup>2</sup>

The basis of the passage in the *midrash halakbah* quoted by Maimonides is Exodus 34:5–8, which informs us that the “ways of God” are manifest in God’s names. In that passage, when Moses requests to be shown God’s presence, God responds by indicating that while Moses cannot directly see God, the divine relational qualities can be revealed to Moses—which God then does by reciting the

divine attributes, which embody those relational virtues. Maimonides further elaborates on this matter:

We are commanded to walk in these intermediate paths—and they are good and straight paths—as it says, “And you shall walk in God’s ways” (Deuteronomy 28:9). [Our sages] taught [the following] explanation of this *mitzvah*: Just as God is called gracious, you shall be gracious; just as God is called merciful, you shall be merciful; just as God is called holy, you shall be holy. In a similar manner, the prophets called God by other names: “slow to anger,” “abundant in kindness,” “righteous,” “just,” “perfect,” “almighty,” “powerful,” and the like. [They did so] to inform us that these are good and just paths. A person is obligated to accustom oneself to these paths and [to try to] resemble God to the extent of one’s ability. Since the Creator is called by these terms and they make up the middle path, which we are obligated to follow, this path is called “the path of God.” This is [the heritage] that our ancestor Abraham taught his descendants, as it says: “For I have known him, that he will command his descendants...to keep the path of God” (Genesis 18:19).<sup>3</sup>

What all of this suggests is that the divine mandate of holiness to the Jewish people requires two dimensions of human response. It requires obedience to God’s commandments, and it also requires the acquisition of noble personal virtues in imitation of the divine qualities revealed in the Torah itself, through their being embedded in the divine attributes (*middot*). Then, to understand the meaning of the holiness of God, we need to understand the divine attributes, and the virtuous qualities that they reflect. Those virtues are the underlying foundation and purpose of the commandments of the Torah—so that through their performance the virtues themselves will be actualized in the real world. Those virtuous qualities are in turn embodied and reflected in the dimensions of symbolic times, persons, objects, and places, as vessels or instruments through which the consciousness of those virtues is maintained and transmitted.

We need then to comprehend three layers of holiness. First, we need to understand the relational qualities that constitute the meaning of the holiness of God. Second, we need to understand how doing *mitzvot* constitutes the actualization of those same virtues in daily life, for the individual and for the society of which he or she is a part. And third, we need to examine the process by which the Jewish religious symbols in which those virtues are embodied may alert us to, and instill within us, the aspiration to partner with God in spreading those virtues and enabling us to transmit them to future generations.

### **The Names of God as Virtues and Their Actualization in Law**

We will begin with an analysis of the *middot* of God declared in Exodus 34:6–7. There is much debate as to precisely which of the words of these verses constitute the traditional count of thirteen divine attributes. There is also much debate concerning how to accurately translate and interpret the varied divine qualities suggested in these names. The following is an attempt at one possible understanding of the individual qualities and of the set as a whole:

And the Eternal passed by before him, and proclaimed:  
 “Adonai, Adonai, God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering  
 and abundant in goodness, and truth; keeping mercy unto the  
 thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression  
 and sin, and acquitting...”<sup>4</sup>

Now, the same passage with the names and attributes numbered:

And the Eternal passed by before him, and proclaimed:

1. Adonai,
2. Adonai,
3. God,
4. merciful and
5. gracious,
6. long-suffering and

7. abundant in goodness and
8. truth;
9. keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation,
10. forgiving iniquity
11. and transgression
12. and sin, and
13. acquitting...

Name #1: *Adonai* The first divine name is the Tetragrammaton, YHVH (*yod-hei-vav-hei*), pronounced as *Adonai* and often translated as “Lord” (although generally rendered as “Eternal” in this volume). It represents the value of productivity—of being productive in the material world. In Genesis 1:1–2:3, the story of creation in seven days, the deity is identified by the generic name *elohim*, meaning “God.” The Tetragrammaton, the four-letter name of God (YHVH), appears for the first time in the Torah in Genesis 2:4, in the compound form *YHVH elohim*, “Adonai God,” meaning “the *elohim* (i.e., deity, God) whose name is Adonai (i.e., the Eternal).” That identification of God by the name “Eternal” then appears again in verses 7, 8, 9, and 15. In each of those five appearances, the name is specifically joined with a verb describing the divine actions in producing the material world. Thus, “the Eternal made,” “the Eternal formed,” “the Eternal planted,” “the Eternal made grow,” and finally “the Eternal took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden, to work it and to protect it.”

Imitation of this divine value would demand that a person be productive in the material world. It is then not accidental that the human is placed in the Garden of Eden “to work it and to protect it,” and that he is granted a mate with whom to procreate—since the productive transformation of the earth, and the re-production of further generations of humans, are the paradigmatic realms of human productivity in imitation of the Divine.

Name # 2: *Adonai* The second divine name is a repetition of the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, which here represents the value of

interdependence. This meaning of the divine name is manifest in the second use of the word YHVH as the name of God, as it appears in Genesis 2:5: “No shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for the Eternal, God, had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a human to till the ground.” This verse indicates that God’s productive purpose in the material world was not to be achieved solely through the actualization of the divine will and word, but was dependent upon the establishment of interdependence, of partnership with humans. Thus the next two verses indicate that God watered the earth and then created the human as a living being, thus creating the conditions under which this interdependence could be actualized.

The imitation of this divine value of interdependence by humanity is immediately made manifest in the Torah in both its affirmative presence and then in its negation. The start of Genesis chapter 4 is the account of the intimate partnership between Adam and Eve, which results in reproduction (the birth of Cain and Abel); this is followed by the farmer Cain’s rejection of an interdependent productive relationship with his shepherd brother Abel, in which he not only kills Abel but then goes on to deny that he bears any responsibility for him (for which he is then punished by God).

Name # 3: *El* The divine name *El* represents the value of responsiveness to danger or distress. This name first appears in Genesis 14 where in rapid succession God is referred to as *El Elyon*, “Supreme God,” four times—first in describing Melchizedek, king of Shalem, as “the priest of *El Elyon*” (Genesis 14:18), then twice by Melchizedek himself (Genesis 14:19–20), and finally once by Abraham in his response to the king (Genesis 14:22). The term *El* is opaque in its particular meaning. However, it is significant that not only does Abraham refer to God with this term, but moreover that God self-identifies with this term when first entering into formal covenant with Abraham, a few chapters hence: “When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Eternal (YHVH) appeared to Abram and said to him: ‘I am God Almighty (*El Shaddai*); walk before Me and be whole-hearted. And I will make my covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly” (Genesis 17:1–2).

What divine quality is manifest in the name *El*? Beginning with its earliest use in the blessings of Melchizedek and continuing to its later uses by Jacob, the term *El* seems always to reflect God's responsive use of divine power to rescue from danger. In the passage referred to above, Melchizedek recognizes that it was God as *El* whose power was manifest in the victory of Abraham, and Abraham recognizes that it was the power of God that made for his victory and therefore does not want to allow the King of Sodom to share in the glory. Later, Jacob refers to his desire to move his family to Beth-El where he "...will make an altar unto God (*El*), who answered me in the day of my distress and was with me in the way which I went" (Genesis 35:3).

The imitation of this divine value by people would be reflected in using human power to rescue others from danger and distress. The broad pattern of the various duties regarding rescue, which the Torah imposes upon Jews in their relationship to fellow Jews (and sometimes even in relation to those outside the covenantal community), is reflective of precisely this divine quality being actualized by persons in their relationship to others. It is not accidental then that the name *El* is used in the context of covenantal responsibilities (Deuteronomy 7:9), or that Moses particularly uses that name of God when he pleads with God to rescue his sister Miriam from the disease that afflicted her (Numbers 12:13).

Name # 4: *Rahum* The divine name *Rahum*, translated as "merciful," is obviously related to the word *rehem* (meaning "womb"), and it represents God's quality of extending unearned love. Strikingly, the words *rahum* and *rahamim* are used in the Torah only once in regard to human feelings. Otherwise, these words refer exclusively to God's own feelings of loving forgiveness, extended to the Jewish people—despite the fact that they have not acted in a manner that earned such feelings.<sup>6</sup> The one instance in which human *rahamim* is referenced occurs in Jacob's prayer upon sending Benjamin to Egypt with his brothers, when he prays that "God Almighty (*El Shaddai*) give you mercy (*rahamim*) before the man, that he may release unto you your

other brother and Benjamin” (Genesis 43:14). Clearly the prayer for an experience of unearned love is a petition that God imbue a person with this divine quality. Indeed, the fulfillment of Jacob’s prayer is directly indicated in a subsequent verse when Joseph, upon seeing his brother Benjamin, is overcome by fiery feelings of love (*niḥm’ru raḥamav*), a love that Benjamin has not earned through any prior interaction with Joseph; Joseph then flees the room to cry privately (Genesis 43:30).

The human imitation of this divine quality is self-evident: it is the cultivation of the capacity to feel loving care even for persons who have not earned it, who do not deserve such a loving response. To respond lovingly to one who deserves such a response by virtue of their prior conduct, or by virtue of the history of the prior relationship, would be an act of justice. The quality of *raḥum* is distinctively applicable when justice would not require such conduct—that is, when it is fully a reflection of mercy.

Name #5: *Hannun* The divine name *Hannun*, meaning “gracious” or “compassionate,” is an expression of God’s virtue of empathy, the ability to share the feelings of joy and pain of another. The Torah provides a vivid example of God’s embodiment of this virtue in Exodus 22:24–26: “If you lend money to My people, to the poor among you, do not act toward them as a creditor: exact no interest from them. If you take your neighbor’s garment in pledge, you must return it to them before the sun sets. It is their only clothing, the sole covering for their skin; in what else shall they sleep? Therefore if they cry out to Me, I will hear, for I am compassionate (*hannun*).” A further expression of divine empathy is found in the divine declaration to Moses that God is aware of the suffering of the Jewish people in Egypt and intends to redeem them from their enslavement: “And the Eternal said: ‘I have surely seen the affliction of My people... and have heard their cry... for I know their pains’” (Exodus 3:7).

In both of these passages, God’s “hearing” (just like God’s “seeing” and “knowing”) is an expression of God’s own perception of the

feelings of pain being experienced by the victims of oppression, which then leads God to act on their behalf. A most powerful indication of this empathy by God is expressed in Exodus 22:21–23: “You shall not oppress any widow or orphan. If you do afflict them, I will hear their outcry as soon as they cry out to Me. And My anger shall blaze forth and I will put you to the sword, and your own wives shall become widows and your children orphans.”

The human imitation of this divine virtue of empathy is also demanded by the Torah. While God’s empathy for suffering and oppression is not based on God’s own experience of those states, there is divine awareness that for humans, empathy is significantly based on having themselves experienced suffering, or being deeply aware of the feelings associated with the oppression and affliction that they now observe others experiencing. Therefore, God’s demands for empathy from the Jewish people often makes reference to their experience of enslavement. Thus, for example: “You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 22:20). In six separate instances in the Torah, God’s demand of empathy for the oppressed and the disadvantaged is justified by the assertion that the Jewish people need to have special feelings for such situations due to their own experience of oppression and enslavement in Egypt. No wonder then that the celebration of Passover requires that every individual Jew in every generation not only retell, but actually re-experience the enslavement of Egypt. It is only based on that virtual experience of oppression that the feeling of Jewish empathy for the oppressed can continue to be strong in every subsequent generation.

Name #6: *Erekh Apayim* The divine name *Erekh Apayim* describes the divine virtue of patience (forbearance), the capacity to postpone acting even in the face of strong emotions such as anger. The single instance in the Torah where God is described as actualizing this quality, described by this very phrase *erekh apayim*, is in the interaction between God and Moses in response to the sin of the spies as told in Numbers 14. God, furious over the refusal of the Jewish people

to move directly to the conquest of the land of Canaan due to the frightening report of ten of the twelve spies, desires to destroy the entire people and to start over again by forming a new elect people out of Moses and his descendants (Numbers 14:11–12). Moses responds with a plea to God to forbear from doing so—not because the people do not deserve such punishment, but based on God’s own best interests. Moses essentially makes three arguments in favor of God’s forbearance (Numbers 14:13–19).

First, he argues that if God were to destroy the Jewish people immediately, the other nations of the world would conclude that God was powerless to actualize the divine will—that is, knowing that it would be impossible to achieve victory against the Canaanite nations and not wanting to suffer an ignominious defeat at their hands, God simply chose to destroy the Jews in the wilderness. Second, Moses suggests that such divine action would be an act of disloyalty toward God’s covenantal partners, who had been publicly intimate with God and had been protected and shielded with such evident divine love. Third, Moses contends that if God were to forgive the Jews, it would demonstrate to the nations of the world that God’s true power lies not in destructive punishment of wrongdoing (as in Egypt), but rather in merciful forbearance. It would show that true power is evident in control over anger, God’s ability to be *erekh apayim*—that is, having the necessary patience to allow the Jewish people to evolve into a nation truly worthy of their covenantal relationship with God. God accedes to Moses petition and forgives the people, but will punish them in a manner that will avoid the negative and highlight the positive outcomes of divine forbearance by having the generation of weak-willed, rebellious adults who emerged from Egypt die out before attempting to bring the next generation into the land of Canaan (Numbers 14:20–24).

Human imitation of this divine virtue of patience or forbearance is demanded by many laws of the Torah, and it is often couched in terms resonant with the motives that Moses suggested as its basis. Thus, Leviticus 19:17–18 forbids acting vengefully in response to

hatred, instead requiring loving chastisement. Acting thus is a manifestation that one is not powerless to achieve the desired end, and that hope for a restored relationship is not lost. It is imperative to partner control over the desire for instant gratification of negative feelings together with the demand for gaining control over the desire for instant gratification of positive feelings, because such action can easily undermine the covenantal commitments that one has with an intimate partner. Thus, for example, no leeway is allowed in the Torah for adulterous relationships. In similar manner, the Torah unequivocally deprives parents of the authority to take the lives of rebellious children—a power fully recognized in virtually every ancient legal system (and still preserved in some modern societies in the guise of “honor killings”). According to the Torah, parents can do no more than bring their children to a court for trial (Deuteronomy 21:18–20). Thus parental authority is manifest not in the power to punish, but rather in the power to control anger, to manifest patience in the hope that the child will be able to be properly redirected through the intervention of the legal system.

Name #7: *Rav Hessed* The divine name *Rav Hessed* is a compound phrase that presents God as acting to satisfy human needs (*hesed*) in a manner that exceeds reasonable expectations (*rav*). The act of *hesed*, as it appears in various relationships in the book of Genesis, bespeaks not only being with a person in his or her time of need, but also taking action in a manner that serves some fundamental human need: saving life (Genesis 19:19), finding a wife (24:12, 14, 27), enabling economic success (32:11), and causing a person in power to look favorably upon one in a disadvantaged state (39:21). In every one of these instances, the beneficiary of the action could not meet his own need without the affirmative act of *hesed* performed by the divine benefactor.

The addition of the adjective *rav*, reflecting the great magnitude of the kindness manifested by God, appears in the Torah only in the two instances where the phrase is used to characterize the great magnitude of divine kindness (Exodus 34:6 and Numbers 14:18). In

all other instances, where the act of beneficence is performed by a person, or a divine messenger, the term *hesed* is used alone without the indication of its special magnitude.<sup>7</sup>

In regard to the duty of human imitation of this divine quality, it is not accidental that every manifestation of kindness described in Genesis as an act of *hesed* is identified by the Torah itself (or by rabbinic teaching) as a personal obligation resting upon every Jew. Thus the obligations to save life, enhance commercial success, facilitate marriages, enable the poor to achieve financial independence, bring peace between persons, and liberate slaves are each either considered as independent *mitzvot*, or are encompassed within the biblical command of “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). The prophet Micah captures the centrality of the human imitation of this divine quality when he encapsulates the essence of God’s expectations of the Jewish people as including (in part) the duty “... to love *hesed*” (Micah 6:8).

Name #8: *Emet* The divine name *Emet* represents God’s virtue of trustworthiness. The word *emet* appears in the Torah with two different meanings. One usage is to describe the accuracy of some information pertaining to an event, confirming that the information is “true.” Thus, when the Torah records the law of destruction of an idolatrous city, it requires that there be evidentiary certainty of the fact that idols had been worshipped: “Then you shall inquire and make search and ask diligently; and behold if it be truth (*emet*) and the thing certain, that such abomination was wrought in your midst...” (Deuteronomy 13:15; the same phrase appears in Deuteronomy 17:4). Similarly, in regard to an accusation of a bride’s lack of chastity, the Torah says, “If this thing [i.e., the accusation] be true (*emet*)...” (Deuteronomy 22:20). The second usage of the word *emet* is to describe a personal virtue, that one is “trustworthy.” Thus, Jethro advises Moses that judges need to be *anshei emet* (Exodus 18:21)—that is, trustworthy men, “truthful” in the sense of having the virtue of personal integrity, who can be trusted to be honest in administering justice. Rather than focusing on the accuracy (“truthfulness”) of a past event, this sense

of *emet* is focused on the inner quality of a person. When the Torah identifies one of the names of God as *Emet* (Exodus 34:6), the word is intended not to suggest the objective “truth” of God, but rather that an essential divine virtue is God’s trustworthiness—that is, God’s honesty and integrity.

That humans are obligated to imitate this divine quality is evident in the multitude of biblical laws that regulate the requirements of honesty and integrity in both commercial and interpersonal relationships. It is not accidental that the consummate divine command to the Jewish people, “You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2), is soon followed by:

You shall not steal; neither shall you deal falsely, nor lie to one another. You shall not swear by My name falsely so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Eternal. You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob them; the wages of a hired servant shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling-block before the blind, but you shall fear your God; I am the Eternal. (Leviticus 19:11–14)

These verses (and many others) attempt not only to command honest behavior, but also to cultivate the inner quality of *emet*, integrity and trustworthiness. It is precisely this point that the sages emphasized when they asked why this particular passage concludes with the phrase “but you shall fear your God.” They responded by noting that with so many forbidden activities, the underlying motive of the actor is unknown and therefore human prosecution is often impossible. People need, therefore, to be reminded that God knows what our motives are, and so we need to exercise control over our behavior based on our cultivation of proper inner virtues even when they will not be enforced by human agents.<sup>8</sup> The importance of human imitation of this divine virtue of trustworthiness is perhaps nowhere more forcefully expressed than in the command: “That which goes out of your lips, you shall observe and do” (Deuteronomy 23:24).

Name #9: *Notzeir Hessed La-alafim* This divine name, “keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation,” is an expression of the virtue of gratitude. The nature of this gratitude can best be understood through the only two other instances in the Torah in which a form of the Hebrew root *nun-tzadi-reish* is used. When Moses, toward the end of his life, describes the intensity of the covenant between God and the Jewish people, he reminds the people that God, as it were, “... found him [Jacob—that is, the Jewish people] in a desert region, in an empty howling waste. God encircled him, watched over him, and guarded him (*yitzrenhu*) as the pupil of God’s eye” (Deuteronomy 32:10). It is striking that the Jewish people’s willingness to remain in the desert for forty years with God is described by the prophet Jeremiah as *hesed ne’urayikh*, “the kindness of your youth,” which God gratefully remembers to their merit (Jeremiah 2:2). It is thus the ancient *hesed* of the Jewish people that continues to elicit God’s gratitude (which is manifest in specific behaviors) for “a thousand years.” The divine virtue of gratitude, recognizing the loyalty of the Jewish people, is reflected in a slightly different form in the next chapter of Deuteronomy. In blessing the tribes, Moses refers to Levi as *ish hasidekha* (Deuteronomy 33:8), and he then goes on to relate that the tribe of Levi was able to disregard the natural love of their fellows in order to execute God’s justice against those who had worshipped the golden calf. They thus placed their loyalty to God over their loyalty to their fellows, says Moses: *et b’rit’kha yin’tzoru*, “they guarded Your covenant” (Deuteronomy 33:10). Here, loyalty to God is considered an act of *hesed*, which in turn elicits divine gratitude as manifest in the eternal appointment of the tribe of Levi as the teachers, leaders, and priests of the Jewish nation (Deuteronomy 33:10–11). These two examples show that when humans act with *hesed* toward God, divine gratitude in remembrance of that *hesed* will be manifest for many generations.

The mandate for humans to imitate this divine quality of gratitude is deeply embedded in the Torah. After years of Egyptian enslavement and oppression of the Jews, it must have come as an extraordinary shock to the people to hear Moses declare in the name of God, “you

shall not abhor an Egyptian, for you were strangers in their land” (Deuteronomy 23:8). That same verse also forbade enmity toward the Edomites, despite the history of antagonism between them and the Israelites, “for he is your kinsman.” Loyalty toward kinsmen, and gratitude for ancient kindnesses, are essential expressions of the imitation of this divine quality.

To these texts one must certainly add the central nature of the peace offering (*sh'lamim*) in the sacrificial practice. Repeatedly in the Torah we are commanded to bring offerings to God in expression of gratitude for the goodness that we experience in life—for both personal occasions (such as the birth of a child, rescue from great danger, or a successful harvest) as well as for the expression of national celebration of historic moments.<sup>9</sup> Certainly the later rabbinic transformation of these offerings into liturgical expressions, as blessings of gratitude toward God at the culmination of every prayer service, was an embodiment of the essential nature of our duty to integrate the divine virtue of gratitude into our own personalities.

Name #10: *Nosei Avon* The divine name *Nosei Avon*, “forgiving iniquity,” is a compound name in which both Hebrew words are of great significance. The word *nosei* appears frequently in the Torah with the related meanings of “to bear,” “to tolerate,” or “to forgive.” Its first appearance is, in fact, in conjunction with the word *avon*. When God confronts Cain about having killed his brother Abel and then metes out punishment for that crime, Cain responds by asking a rhetorical question: “*Gadol avoni mi-n'so?* Is my sin too great for You to bear/forgive?” (Genesis 4:13, as per Rashi’s comment to the verse). God does forgive Cain and mitigates the punishment (although it is not cancelled altogether): Cain is provided with protection so that the prescribed penalty of exile—that is, permanent wandering—will not become a death penalty (Genesis 4:15). Cain apparently had expected that divine forgiveness would result in God simply disregarding the crime, but he was mistaken. Divine forgiveness still required accountability of Cain for his action, but it also ensured that Cain would have another opportunity (albeit as a wanderer) to

make a new life for himself, armed with the wisdom that he had now acquired. What, then, is the meaning of the word *nosei*? In five other instances in the Torah, it is clear that this word means that one will bear responsibility for one's conduct. The phrase *tissa alav heit* means "he will bear responsibility for the action as a sin" (Leviticus 19:17, 22:9; Numbers 18:22, 32; Deuteronomy 15:9). Thus the word *nosei* bears the dual meanings of both "forgiving" and "holding accountable."

We will now explore the word *avon*, in order to establish its meaning with greater clarity. As discussed above, this noun is used by Cain to describe his sin, which is homicide. Strikingly, elsewhere in the Torah, the word *avon* is only used to describe other crimes of a particularly grave nature. It is the word used in conjunction with adultery (Numbers 5:15) as well as various incestuous relationships (Leviticus 20:19), as well as with idolatry (Exodus 20:5) and other forms of inappropriate conduct toward the sanctuary and its material accouterments (Exodus 28:38, 43). Moreover, Judah describes the theft of Joseph's enchanted cup as an *avon* (Genesis 44:16). The word *avon* is used to describe the sin of acting dismissively (*b'keri*) toward God (Leviticus 26:27, 40). And, in an unclear passage, the unspecified sins of the Amorites, which will eventually justify God's subjecting them to destruction at the hands of the Israelites, are also referred to as *avon* (Genesis 15:16).

The particularly grave set of sins referred to as *avon* appears to be almost perfectly consonant with the set of fundamental laws that the sages termed the Seven Noachide Laws, which they understood to represent the will of God for all of humanity. These include prohibitions against murder, idolatry, theft, and sexual immorality (including adultery and incest)—all of which, as we have seen above, are described with the word *avon*. The Noachide Laws also require the establishment of a court system, to ensure basic standards of justice, and we may reasonably propose that the crime of the Amorites (referenced above) was precisely their failure to create such a just society. Moreover, the further Noachide Law prohibiting blasphemy,

which is the despicable action of cursing God, may be precisely what is abrogated by the inappropriate behavior toward God and the divine precincts, as referenced above. The only Noachide Law that we have not seen described by the Torah as *avon* is the prohibition of eating the limb torn from a living animal—an act of exceptional cruelty that was almost universal in antiquity. Thus, the word *avon* might be the Torah's term to describe the breach of fundamental, universal human standards of moral conduct (which are, in turn, laid out by the sages in the Noachide Laws).

What does it mean, then, to say that God is *nosei avon*? Building on the insights above, we may suggest that while God will exact punishment for degraded behavior and will hold individuals (and nations) accountable for their actions, the promise of divine forgiveness will always be held out as well, with the assurance that a second chance will be offered so that the sinner can pursue a better, more noble path. This is, in fact, exactly what the Torah tells us happened, every time that Israel sinned and God forgave them. After they made the golden calf, God forgave the people, just as Moses asked—but insisted that those individuals who actually worshipped the calf be punished, while the nation as a whole would have a renewed opportunity to make a new future for themselves in the land that God had promised to their ancestors (Exodus 32:31–33:2). When the people were swayed by the report of the ten spies and refused to enter the promised land, God did in fact forgive them (as Moses pleaded)—yet still exacted punishment of the entire nation by requiring them to wander in the desert for forty years, and only thereafter allowing the new generation to enter the land (Numbers 14:20–31). And this is also the basic pattern of the *toheikhabh*, the national chastisement that spells out the consequences that will ensue if the people forsakes the covenant: God warns that there will be destruction and exile, but God will also forgive and provide a future opportunity to choose a better path, by ultimately restoring the people to the land (Leviticus 26:14–45).

Thus the core meaning of this tenth name of God, *Nosei Avon*, is that God demands accountability for human behavior, but divine

forgiveness will also provide people with a second chance to redirect the course of their lives toward the fulfillment of the divine will. That is: even after despicable human conduct (*avon*), God will hold accountable but also forgive (*nosei*). God demands that we too act in this manner, and so this intersection of the twin ideas of accountability and forgiveness is built into the very structure of the Jewish judicial process. For example: a thief who is unable to repay a loss caused to a victim may be sold into indentured servitude, but the term of service is limited to six years and, in order to ensure that the individual will be able to make a transition to a new and honest life after the period of servitude, the owner is obligated to provide him with a grubstake upon manumission (Deuteronomy 15:13–14, in light of Exodus 21:37–22:2).

Name #11: *Nosei Pesha* The divine name *Nosei Pesha*, “forgives transgression,” carries forward the central elements of the preceding name by incorporating the word *nosei*, which (as we have seen) means that God both forgives and holds accountable. The distinctiveness of this particular name, then, must be embedded in the distinct meaning of the word *pesha*. This term is used only twice in the book of Genesis: once spoken by Jacob and once alleged to have been spoken by Jacob. The first instance occurs when Jacob indignantly defends his own integrity, after Laban accuses him of having stolen the latter’s household idols: “And Jacob was angry...and he said to Laban, ‘What is my transgression (*pishi*)? What is my sin, that you have pursued me?’” (Genesis 31:36). Jacob continues with a lengthy speech, avowing that he had always honored his work-responsibilities toward Laban, even going beyond what he was duty-bound to do. In the second instance, Joseph’s brothers address him after the death of their father, fearful that he will now take revenge for the fact they had sold him into slavery. They allege that Jacob had instructed them to deliver the following message: “Thus you shall say to Joseph, ‘Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression (*pesha*) of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong’; and now, please forgive the transgression (*pesha*) of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spoke to him” (Genesis 50:17).

The distinctive element in the use of the word *pesha*, as illustrated by these two examples, is not primarily the gravity of the crime (as in the case of *avon*). Rather, it is the betrayal of a relationship that demands trust. In the first instance, Jacob understands Laban's accusation to intimate a breach of trust, both as a member of the family and as an employee. In the second instance, the brothers understand that they have betrayed the trust due to a brother. It is not surprising, then, that the few subsequent usages of the word *pesha* in the Torah that are related to specific wrongdoing also have to do with betrayal of trust. In Exodus 22:8, the term *pesha* is used to describe loss or damage to a person's property that has been entrusted to someone else's care. In Exodus 23:20–21, Israel is warned not to betray the messenger appointed by God to lead them into the promised land.

But, in the face of betrayal of trust, how can forgiveness still be possible? The passage about the brothers' speech to Joseph provides us with insight as to how people—or God, for that matter—might grant forgiveness even in the face of betrayal. The verse quoted above (Genesis 50:17) actually contains two separate pleas for forgiveness: the first by Jacob and the second by the brothers themselves. Jacob's plea is based simply on the fact they are all brothers, part of the same family. The plea for forgiveness by the brothers, however, is based instead on the assertion that they are all common servants of the God of their father. In Jacob's plea, it is the sheer power of the relationship between family members—the breach of which would generate fury at having been betrayed—that can serve to impel forgiveness, and the consequent opportunity to restore the familial relationship to its proper covenantal commitment. In the plea of the brothers, the fact that they all share a covenant with the common ancestral God is determinative; this serves as both the source of intense anger at betrayal, and also as the source of reconciliation and a second chance, made possible through forgiveness.

Why, then, does God forgive sins of *pesha*, sins of betrayal of trust? No doubt, it is due to a combination of the above reasons—which we have seen above operating in the realm of human relationships,

but is just as incisive in the realm of the divine. Foremost, God is party to a covenant with us; and that covenant is designed to achieve a common mission, a common vision for the world, and achieving that reality depends on the divine-human partnership. This is already intimated in the first and second names of God, *Adonai Adonai*. As indicated earlier, the first of those names describes God's purposefulness in creation, and the second name indicates the further quality of interdependence between God and humanity in achieving the purposes of creation. Thus the divine-human covenant (later: the divine-Jewish covenant) is motivated by God's own vision for the world.

But what quality would lead God to forgive and try again, not only after serious misconduct but even after behavior that betrays the covenantal relationship itself? The Talmud asserts: "In every place where you find manifestation of the mightiness of God, there you find also manifestation of divine humility" (B. Megillah 31a). It is the divine quality of humility that overcomes God's pride and allows God to forgive us and to allow us another chance at achieving our joint covenantal mission in the world (even while still holding us accountable for our misdeeds). Thus, the divine name *Nosei Pesha* carries further the quality of *nosei avon* insofar as God not only forgives grave sins, but does so even for sins that manifest betrayal of the covenantal relationship with God—and this is due to God's additional quality of humility.

The human imitation of this divine quality of humility—generating forgiveness despite betrayal—is frequently implied in laws of the Torah. For example, when the Israelites sought to pass peacefully through the land of Edom (and even offered to pay for whatever goods they would need while there), the Edomites refused to allow them to do so (Numbers 20:14–21). Despite this hostile conduct, the Torah commands: "You shall not loathe an Edomite, for he is your brother" (Deuteronomy 23:8). The very fact that Edom is Israel's "brother" made their refusal such a disappointing betrayal of the trust that should have existed between two related nations. Yet,

God demands that we act with humility and not harbor a grudge against the Edomites, but rather forgive them and allow for the possibility of an improved relationship in the future. In like manner, when an individual is personally offended by the conduct of another, the Torah expects an amicable resolution of the injured feelings: rather than exacting vengeful retribution, one should chastise the wrongdoer and attempt to secure an apology (or at least have the opportunity to clear the air)—so that following forgiveness, it will be possible to restore a caring relationship (Leviticus 19:17–18). Here too, the critical quality to be demonstrated by the hurt party is humility: one cannot be so personally offended by the betrayal that one would be willing to simply terminate the relationship. Rather, humility must lead to forgiveness, providing a second chance, while also holding the wrongdoer accountable for his or her conduct.

It is not accidental that the Torah informs us that “the man Moses was most humble of all persons living on earth” (Numbers 12:3) precisely at the moment when he had been betrayed by his own sister and brother. As God reprimanded them for their behavior and punished Miriam with a skin disease, Moses pleaded with God to heal her. It was precisely Moses’ humility that enabled him to forgive immediately. God reminds Moses, however, that even in the face of forgiveness, accountability is essential; therefore, God imposed upon Miriam the punishment of seven days’ exclusion from the camp. The biblical narrative thus lays out both God’s own virtue, and the way in which humans are expected to imitate that virtue.

Name #12: *Nosei Hatta’ah* The divine name *Nosei Hatta’ah*, “forgives sin,” is the third time that we see divine forgiveness juxtaposed with holding individuals accountable for their behavior. In this instance, the forgiveness is for action characterized as *heit* or *hatta’ah*. What do these terms mean? How does *hata’ah* differ from *avon* and *pesha*, and what divine characteristic is necessary in order for this quality to be manifest?

First, what is *heit* or *hatta’ah*? The word *heit*, both as a noun and in its related verbal forms, is actually the most common word used in

the Torah to describe sinful or wrongful action. It is used to describe the most serious of crimes, such as adultery (Genesis 20:6), homicide (Genesis 42:22), and idolatry (Exodus 32:30), as well as unspecified crimes of sufficient magnitude to warrant the total destruction of Sodom (Genesis 18:20). And it is also used as a generic term to describe any crime at all (Leviticus 4:3), as well as both serious and less serious acts of rebellion (Numbers 21:7; 22:34). The term *heit* is used to describe both intentional and unintentional wrongdoing (Exodus 9:34 and Leviticus 5:15, respectively). It encompasses both wrongdoing against God (Exodus 10:16) and against fellow humans (Leviticus 5:21). The term can point to wrongdoing performed by a common person (Leviticus 5:1), a gentile king (Genesis 20:6), an anointed priest (Leviticus 4:4), a prince of the Israelites (Leviticus 4:22), or even the legislature (Leviticus 4:13). Compounding the complexity of the word *heit*, it should be noted that sometimes the word appears to be used not for the sin itself, but rather for the punishment due for the sins (Genesis 20:9 and Exodus 32:34). And as happens (albeit rarely) with other words in the Torah, the same Hebrew root can, in some instances, be used to connote precisely the opposite—that is, the process of being cleansed from the stain of the sin (Leviticus 14:52 and Numbers 19:19).

Given the broad range of meaning associated with this word, it should come as no surprise to discover that the very first time that the Torah speaks of human wrongdoing, it is with a word derived from this root. There is no general word for “sin” used in the biblical passage recounting the misdeeds of Adam and Eve that results in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. However, God’s warning to Cain—containing a personification of sin—reads as follows: “... sin (*hattat*) lies at the door; and to you shall be its desire, and yet you may rule over it” (Genesis 4:7). This generic usage of the word *hattat* (from the same root as *heit*) stands in stark contrast to the term *avon*, by which Cain refers to his own crime of fratricide a few verses hence (Genesis 4:13). As we have seen, the Torah continues to use *avon* for particularly grave sins that are universal; similarly, the Torah reserves the use of the term *pesha* for a particular set of crimes, which involve betrayal of trust in a relationship. This leaves the term

*heit* (and its related forms) available for use in the broadest generic sense to encompass all forms of wrongdoing.

If we have already learned, from the prior divine attributes, that God forgives (albeit with accountability) sins of the magnitude of *avon* and *pesha*, then why is it necessary to add this third name to the series? Is it not self-evident that if God forgives both grave universal sins (*avon*) and sins of betrayal (*pesha*), then potentially milder sins (*heit*, *hattat*, *hatta'ah*) would certainly be forgiven? Understanding the former two names helps us realize that God does forgive wrongdoing, and that the quality of humility even allows God also to forgive crimes involving personal betrayal; but what does this third name add to our understanding of divine qualities? Is there some other divine quality that is being suggested, which would only be manifest in God's forgiveness of *heit*?

On two separate occasions early in the book of Genesis, it appears as if God despairs of the capacity of humans to achieve and sustain goodness. The first instance is in the passage just cited, when God acknowledges to Cain that the temptation to do evil is ever-present (Genesis 4:7). The second instance is after the flood, when Noah emerges from the ark and offers sacrifices, and God responds by saying: "I will not again curse the ground any more due to humankind, for the imagination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing, as I have done" (Genesis 8:21). In this latter instance, God may be despairing specifically because of Noah's violence against animals (a plausible suggestion, since it was violence—albeit violence by humans against other humans—that had prompted God to destroy the world in the first place). Alternatively, God may be recognizing that while human evil cannot be eliminated, it might at least be balanced by expressions of gratitude in recognition of divine power and goodness. In either case, God is determined to go forward with the experiment of seeing whether humans with free will can be brought into partnership with the Divine, in moving toward a more perfected world. God remains filled with hope.

It is this divine quality of hope that makes it both necessary and possible for God to forgive the broad range of wrongful conduct that is, as it were, the norm of human existence—which needs to be governed and moderated, but which can never be fully extirpated. It is this same quality of hope that needs to be imitated by every parent—ever hopeful of inculcating in one’s children basic norms of moral conduct, but at the same time fully aware that one’s own moral commitments are not automatically passed on to one’s offspring. It is precisely for this reason that the Torah needed to mandate the teaching of Torah as a parental responsibility (Deuteronomy 6:7), and needed to create a national obligation to assure the exposure of all citizens to the values and the laws embodied in the Torah (Deuteronomy 31:12). Neither individuals nor society as a whole can lose hope in the potential for goodness that is contained within every human being, despite the understanding that temptation and failure will always be present. Thus, the distinctive characteristic of this twelfth name of God, *nosei hata’ah*, inheres in the quality of hope—which yields the divine capacity for forgiveness, even of the routine sins and wrongdoing reflected by the terms *heit* and *hata’ah*.

Name # 13: *Nakeih* The thirteenth of the divine names is a matter of substantial dispute among commentators. Maimonides considers the entire latter part of this verse to be a single divine attribute, which is the only one of the thirteen that is not a characteristic of mercy. He reads Exodus 34:7 as: “[God] will by no means clear the guilty, but will visit the iniquity of the ancestors upon the descendants, upon the children’s children to the third and fourth generations.”<sup>10</sup> Nahmanides agrees with that understanding, but sees it as denoting a quality of mercy: God will not forgive the sinner, but will instead spread out the punishment over many generations as an act of mercy toward the wrongdoer.<sup>11</sup> In yet a third approach, Samson Raphael Hirsch reads the first part of the statement (“yet remitting nothing”) as a separate divine quality of mercy, because it refers to a sinner who fails to repent—thereby implying that with complete repentance, God forgives fully.<sup>12</sup> This understanding is also implied in the writings of Recanati,<sup>13</sup> and is in conformity with the traditional mode of public

reading of this passage in the synagogue on fast days during the Torah service, when the reader pauses after the word *v'nakeib*—indicating that God does indeed pardon when repentance has taken place. This allows the latter part of the verse to be read in reference to a sinner who does not repent, in regard to whom “[God] does not forgive, but will visit the iniquity of the parents upon the children...” While these readings differ from each other, they all share an understanding that the thirteenth divine name is a quality of mercy related to forgiveness. But what precisely does this name mean?

The divine name *Nakeib* moves us beyond the qualities of forgiveness and accountability, implicit in the preceding three names, to that of pardon in the framework of justice. The most frequent meaning of the word *naki* (and its associated root, *nun-kof-bei*) in the Torah is “innocent.” If the suspected adulteress emerges healthy from the ordeal of the bitter waters, she is thereby deemed to have been innocent (*v'nik'tab*, Numbers 5:28). The court is adjured not to put to death a *naki*, an innocent person (Exodus 23:7), but to be sure to avenge the shedding of the blood of a *naki*, an innocent victim.<sup>14</sup>

However, the very earliest use of this term in the Torah is in the story of Abraham’s servant finding a wife for Isaac, and in that context it has a slightly different meaning. The servant asks Abraham what to do if he finds a woman who refuses to return to Canaan with him: should he bring Isaac to Haran? Abraham responds vehemently in the negative, but then takes account of the servant’s concern, reassuring him: “If the woman does not consent to come back with you, then you will be relieved (*v'nikkita*) of this oath to me” (Genesis 24:8). The servant repeats this usage twice more, in his subsequent report to Rebecca’s family concerning the oath that Abraham imposed upon him: “Then you will be relieved (*tinnakeh*) of my oath; if you come to my family and they do not allow you [to take her]; you shall be relieved (*naki*) of my oath” (Genesis 24:41). In two additional instances, the word *naki* also seems to mean to be relieved of responsibilities. A man newly married is to be *naki*, relieved of all communal responsibilities (including military service in discretionary

wars), for the entire first year of his marriage (Deuteronomy 24:5). Also, the two and a half tribes who desired to remain on the eastern side of the Jordan were told that they must share in the national responsibility of the conquest of the land of Canaan: if they would enter the land and battle with their kinsmen, they could later return to the eastern side of the Jordan and be reunited with their families there. If they fulfill this condition, Moses tells them that they would then be *n'kiyyim*, relieved of their responsibilities both to God and to the rest of the Jewish people (Numbers 32:22).

Of these two related meanings—"innocent" and "relieved"—how are we to understand the use of *nakeih* as a quality of mercy? It would seem that it cannot refer to innocence, since that is a quality of justice, not of mercy. On the other hand, to grant pardon to one who has committed a crime and then repented, thus mitigating the full extent of the punishment that would have otherwise been meted out, is a quality of mercy within the framework of seeing justice done. And this is exactly the meaning of the talmudic teaching of Rabbi Elazar that most commentators rely upon, and which is reflected in our discordant reading of the verse on fast days. But if the preceding three divine attributes spoke to accountability as well as forgiveness, then what element of punishment could still be pardoned? And how is this quality of mercy to be enacted by humans? In the divine admonition (*tokbeihab*) of Leviticus 26, and again in that of Deuteronomy 29–30, it is clear that the national rebellion of the Jewish people against God's covenant with them warrants the most dire and severe punishment. But in each case, there is divine reassurance that God will not completely and totally withdraw from the covenant. Instead, God will await the people's repentance. When that occurs, God will accept their return and will restore the divine presence among them (Leviticus 26:40–45; Deuteronomy 30:1–10). Divine pardon thus effects restoration of God's presence within the Jewish nation, bringing to an end the period of divine hiddenness (*besteir panim*).

The human analogue to this divine quality is treated at length in the Tamud (B. Yoma 87a–b), and then codified in detail by

Maimonides (M.T. Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:9–11). It is reported there that for any wrongdoing committed against a person, repentance is not complete until the sinner both compensates the victim for the loss suffered and also appeases the person wronged—and gains forgiveness from the wronged party. Rambam adds: “It is forbidden for a person to be cruel and not to be appeased. Rather, one should be easy to appease but difficult to anger; and at the moment that a sinner pleads to be forgiven, one ought to forgive wholeheartedly and with a willing spirit. Even if one suffered from much anguish and wrongdoing, one should not take revenge in actions nor revenge in words” (Hilkhot Teshuvah 2:10). Rambam does not quote the end of the biblical verse that prohibits the varied forms of revenge, but those words are of critical importance to us: “... and you shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). The role of a human pardon, like the role of divine pardon, is to overcome the alienation between the wrongdoer and the wronged party—to restore the covenantal love that needs to exist between God and the Jewish people, as well as among individual members of the Jewish people. That alienation is the consequence of (or: the punishment for) crime or sin, but it can be overcome by proper repentance, and the subsequent pardon that results from appeasement of the wronged party after just compensation has been made.

In summary: divine holiness is the set of thirteen qualities of mercy made manifest in God’s relationship with the world. Human holiness emerges when people make those qualities part of their own personalities, and actualize those qualities through their behavior. The thirteen divine attributes, which reflect those qualities, are as follows:

1. The Tetragrammaton (YHVH), *Adonai* (often translated as “Lord” or “the Eternal”), is the value of productivity—of being purposefully productive in the material world.
2. Again, the Tetragrammaton (YHVH), *Adonai* (often translated as “Lord” or “the Eternal”), which here represents the value of interdependence.

3. *El*, “God,” represents the value of responsiveness to the danger or distress of others.
4. *Rahum*, “merciful,” obviously related to the word *rehem* (meaning “womb”), represents the quality of extending unearned love.
5. *Hannun*, “gracious” or “compassionate,” is an expression of the virtue of empathy, the ability to share the feelings of joy and pain of another.
6. *Erekb Apayim*, “long-suffering,” describes the virtue of patience (forbearance), the capacity to postpone acting even in the face of strong emotions such as anger.
7. *Rav Hessed*, “abundant in goodness,” is a compound phrase that presents God as acting to satisfy human needs (*hesed*), in a manner that exceeds reasonable expectations (*rav*).
8. *Emet*, “truth,” represents the virtue of trustworthiness—that is, having the qualities of honesty and integrity.
9. *Notzeir Hessed La-alafim*, “keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation,” is an expression of the virtue of gratitude.
10. *Nosei Avon*, “forgiving iniquity,” means that while God will exact punishment for degraded conduct (*avon*), God will also forgive—granting a second chance, in order to pursue a more noble path.
11. *Nosei Pesha*, “forgiving transgression,” indicates that God bears that same quality of forgiving while still demanding accountability, but even in relation to sins that are rooted in and manifest personal betrayal of the covenantal relationship—and this is due to the additional divine quality of humility.
12. *Nosei Hata'ah*, “forgiving sin,” represents the quality of hope, which makes it both necessary and possible for God to forgive (again, with accountability) the broad base of wrongful conduct that is, as it were, the norm of human existence—which needs to be governed and moderated but which can never be fully extirpated.

13. *Nakeib* moves beyond the qualities of forgiveness and accountability included in the preceding three names, to that of pardon in the framework of justice. God will await repentance and, when that occurs, the divine presence will be restored.

### **The Symbolic Embodiment of Holiness**

I noted at the outset of this essay that aside from using the term *kadosh* to describe the virtues and values of God, the Torah also uses the term *kadosh* to denominate a broad series of entities in divergent realms within which normal human existence is experienced: the realms of time, persons, objects, and places. These latter references to holiness are not random, but appear in coherent parallel sets. It is to these sets that we will now turn our attention as a way of evaluating the way in which holiness is embodied in these symbolic vessels. We will examine the process by which the Torah embedded the divine virtues and values within Jewish religious symbols in order to alert us to, and instill within us, the aspiration to partner with God in actualizing those virtues, and enabling us to transmit them to future generations.

#### **Layers of Holiness: Maimonides on the Meaning of *Mitzvot***

The manifestation of holiness in these realms suggests that the instances of holiness are actually educational instruments through which God transmits truths, virtues, and values that are to be integrated into the lives of God's human covenantal partners. This notion conforms to the approach taken by Maimonides in *The Guide to the Perplexed*, where he argues that:

The Torah as a whole aims at two things: the welfare of the soul and the welfare of the body. As to the welfare of the soul,

it consists in people acquiring correct opinions according to their capacity. Some of these truths are set forth explicitly and some are set forth allegorically....As to the welfare of the body, it comes about through the proper management of the relations in which we live one to another. This we can attain in two ways: First, by removing all violence from our midst—that is to say, that every person does not do as they please, desire, and have the power to do; but every one of us does that which contributes toward the common welfare. Second, in the acquisition by every human being of moral qualities that are essential for life in society, so that the affairs of the society may be well ordered. (*Guide* III 27)

According to Maimonides, each commandment of the Torah serves one or more of three purposes. First, it may teach a fundamental truth about God or the world, or instruct as to what is false so that we do not lead our lives in the darkness of falsehood. For example, the Torah mandates that we believe in the absolute unity of God and in God's creation of the universe, because those are essential truths; and it explicitly forbids engaging in communication with the dead, because that is humanly impossible and is simply a fraud perpetrated to exploit naive people. A second purpose would be to regulate social conduct in consonance with fundamental social values designed to constrain people from injuring each other, and mandating their beneficial actions within society. Thus, for example, the Torah explicitly forbids murder, theft, and tale-bearing, while it mandates the rescue of endangered persons, the return of lost property, and the support of the poor and the stranger. A third purpose that underlies the laws of the Torah is the cultivation of noble personal qualities, which serve as the constant underpinnings of both of the previous purposes—since personal moral virtues are necessary to sustain and enhance moral social conduct, and they are essential as well to sustain the commitment to truth and to eradicate falsehood and exploitation.

But Maimonides has alerted us to the fact that these truths, virtues, and values are not only conveyed in the Torah explicitly;

they are often conveyed as well allegorically, in parables, or through rituals in which the truths, virtues, and values are embedded and expressed through symbolic actions. This proposition is essential for Maimonides' contention that no *mitzvah* is without purpose, that every law of the Torah is intended to have some human benefit (contrary to the position of some of his philosopher antecedents). He is then able, in the later chapters of Book III of *The Guide*, to spell out in substantial detail how both the practical laws of the Torah for human governance, as well as the ritual laws (which some others see as purely expressive of divine will—that is, they are absent any purpose other than to demonstrate human compliance and submission to the divine will), are in fact all expressions of divine wisdom about human nature. All of the laws thus serve the common set of purposes leading to the perfection of both body and soul.

It is in the spirit of this teaching that we need to understand that the careful layering of different expressions of holiness in time, persons, objects, and places are not just random phenomena, but are in fact part of the broader design through which the Torah's rituals related to holiness can reinforce for us the fundamental virtues and social values that inhere in the divine attributes.

### **Holiness of Time**

The earliest appearance of the notion of holiness in the Torah is found at the very end of the story of creation, where we read: "God blessed the seventh day and made it holy" (Genesis 2:3). It is striking that despite the fact that this investment of holiness in the seventh day comes after the creation of man and woman, the humans themselves play no role whatsoever in this investment of holiness in time; nor is there any indication that this change in the nature of the seventh day is communicated to them. In fact, neither the Sabbath nor its holiness is mentioned again in the book of Genesis. It is only in the book of Exodus, when the Israelites are in the desert and God provides them with the manna, that Moses instructs them to collect

a double portion of the manna on the sixth day instead of searching for it on the seventh day, for "...tomorrow is a solemn rest, a holy Sabbath unto the Eternal" (Exodus 16:23).

The implications then are clear. The holiness of the Sabbath is invested by God, without human participation, and is therefore absolute and inalienable. The Jewish people, according to the sages, are only commanded to verbally declare the fact of the holiness of the Sabbath, but they need not engage in any action that would imply that they are actually effecting its sanctification. Thus for the rabbis, the fourth commandment of the Decalogue, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), creates a legal duty only to make the appropriate verbal declarations of the holiness of the Sabbath at its inception (Kiddush) and at its exit (Havdalah). Neither that verse nor any other presumes to grant people the capacity to alter the innate holiness of the seventh day, which was invested in it by the declaration of God at the time of creation.

When the Torah later commands, "You shall observe the Sabbath, for it is holy unto you" (Exodus 31:14), it is clear that the Sabbath is time made holy by God, which humans need to observe—only, as it were, to bask in the glow of the divinely invested holiness. Even the rabbinically mandated action of lighting candles just prior to the inception of the Sabbath is clearly intended as a preparatory act in which the individual ritually marks the onset of the Sabbath, after which time no other materially productive labor (including the kindling of lights) will be permitted. But neither the action of kindling the lights, nor the blessing recited over the act that acknowledges its mandated character, are actions that actually invest the time itself with holiness. That investment of holiness was done once, by God, at the outset of creation. Humans have only the capacity to observe and rejoice in the gift of the Sabbath, but not to see themselves as the masters, the creators, of that holy time.

What divine name, what divine quality, is manifest in the performance of the commandments associated with the Sabbath?

The central element of the observance of the Sabbath resides in ritual inaction, in refraining from performing *m'lakhab*, labor (Exodus 20:10)—that is, not engaging in the material transformation of objects in a manner that reflects human power and control. As in all other instances of temporary withdrawal from normally permissible activities, the purpose of the withdrawal is definitely not to negate the significance of the abstained-from activity, nor is it a suggestion that the activity is in any way wrongful. Rather, such temporary withdrawals—such as not eating on Yom Kippur, or refraining from sexual intercourse during a women's menstrual period—are designed to confirm the essential human nature of the activity, and to provide a periodic withdrawal for the sake of evaluating the activity. Thus, refraining from productive labor on Shabbat involves the recognition that such purposeful work is in fact essential for every human being. But it is also critical to recognize that human productivity is itself a manifestation of imitating God, whose purposive productivity was (and remains) the very foundation of all material existence. Therefore, human productivity must be tested by determining whether it conforms to the divine purposes of integrity and human benefit that characterize God's own productive force in the world, thereby reflecting the influence of the first divine name—that is, God's own attribute of being purposely productive in the material world.

How different is the language of the Torah in regard to the holiness of the festivals. The Torah never refers to a divine act or speech through which the holiness of the festivals is invested, such as, "And God blessed the festival days and made them holy." Rather, the Torah repeatedly emphasizes that "these are the festivals of the Eternal, holy occasions, which you shall proclaim in their appointed season" (Leviticus 23:4; cf. also verse 2; emphasis added). God invested these dates with the potential for holiness, but the actualization of their holiness is contingent upon the festivals being proclaimed by humans at the appropriate time. In this manner, the rabbis understood that the actual investment of holiness in the festivals was dependent upon the Sanhedrin declaring the correct day to start the Hebrew month in which the festival would fall. Thus, the fifteenth of Nisan *could* be

the holy day of Passover by divine determination, but no holiness would be invested in any actual day until the Sanhedrin declared which day would be the first of the month of Nisan. In consequence of that human declaration of Rosh Hodesh, the potential holiness of the fifteenth of that month came to be actualized in a specific day.

In contrast to the holiness of the Sabbath, which is absolute and inalienable, vested by God in every seventh day, the holiness of the festivals is the product of partnership between God and humans. The actualization of the divinely ordained potential for holiness of the dates of the festivals is contingent, and can occur only in consequence of the action of humans partnering with God to “proclaim” those holy days. The necessary proclamation was not an optional act on the part of the people; the central legislature (known most commonly as the Sanhedrin) was mandated to establish the calendar and proclaim the new moon, which would indicate the start of each new month. Thus, in this second layer of holiness of time, God invested a specific date with the potential for holiness, but then commanded human beings to act as partners with the Divine in actualizing that potential, by proclaiming the new month—thus effectuating the divine investment of holiness in a specific day.

This distinction between the two forms of holiness is further recognized by the sages, who saw significance in the fact that the mandate to rejoice (*v'samahta*, Deuteronomy 16:14) applies exclusively to the festivals, but not to the Sabbath. They further distinguish between the term *simḥah*, meaning rejoicing, and the term *oneg*, used by Isaiah (58:13) in reference to the Sabbath. They understood *oneg* to be of rabbinic authority, generating a less intense duty of happiness in the celebration of the Sabbath, as compared to the duty of *simḥah* created by the biblical mandate concerning the festivals. Despite the fact that the holiness of the Sabbath is derived exclusively from God, the joy generated by the festivals is indeed more intense, precisely because its holiness is derived from the partnership between God and people. The term *simḥah* seems to have been reserved in rabbinic usage for those contexts in which the character

of the joy is shaped by partnership, rather than by the effort of a sole individual. It is not surprising, therefore, that the most prevalent term used to describe the joy of a wedding is not *oneg*, but rather *simḥab*—as it is a joy born of communal, rather than individual, effort. The term *simḥab* refers to the intense joy taken in the product of the joint effort of partners; the term *oneg* reflects the lesser joy experienced by an individual basking in the pleasurable benefits of the distinct and separate action of another. Thus, the Sabbath—despite its higher level of holiness—produces a lesser experience of joy, because it results from taking pleasure in what God has created for us, in which process we humans have played no essential productive role.

What divine name, what divine quality, is manifest in the observance of the festivals? Obviously, the overriding quality that inheres in this second layer of holiness in time is that of the second divine name, which represents God's value of interdependence. In contrast to the Sabbath, which commemorates God's own exclusive action, each one of the festivals commemorates either a historical event or a potential performance in which the partnership between persons and God is of the essence. This is an element that is common to the entire cycle of festivals; in addition, each of the festivals contains some additional reflection on a particular divine attribute that we symbolically enact on that distinctive festival.

In Passover, the interdependence between God and the Jewish people is clear from the outset. When Moses is sent to lead the people out of Egypt, God emphasizes repeatedly that he needs to bring the people along, and Moses repeatedly insists that the people will not follow him (Exodus 3:13–4:9). In fact, the midrash to Exodus 13:18 suggests that only one-fifth of the Jews chose to leave Egypt with Moses, as the rest lacked the faith to join in the Exodus.<sup>15</sup> That small fraction of the enslaved Israelites became the Jewish people: they entered into an enduring, eternal covenantal partnership with God, thus making manifest the second divine name. Moreover, Moses reminds the people that God did not elect them as a holy nation due to their own exceptional qualities, but rather because of God's love

for their ancestors, who had been promised that their descendants would inherit the land of Canaan after their liberation from Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:6–9). This festival thus reflects another essential divine attribute: the lovingkindness that God showed in taking Israel out of Egypt was unearned love, a manifestation of the fourth divine name, *rahum*. In the observance of the ritual holiness of this festival, there is thus an opportunity to experience and to transmit the qualities of both interdependence and of unearned love.

The festival of Shavuot is also the product of the interdependent relationship between God and the Jewish people. The revelation at Sinai is preceded by God's offer of covenant to the nation, and is clearly contingent upon their acceptance. The vital importance of the people's acceptance is underscored by their declaration, "all that the Eternal will speak to us, we will do" (Exodus 19:8). Beyond this reflection of the second divine attribute, the starting point of the revelation at Sinai is the truth of the unity of God, who is both Creator and Redeemer. This serves as the foundation for the conviction of the truth of revelation, and the trustworthiness of God to maintain the covenantal promises to the Jewish people (Numbers 23:19), thus reflecting the eighth divine attribute: *emet*, God's trustworthiness.

The festival of Sukkot commemorates God's protection of the Jewish people as they wandered in the desert for forty years. The prophet Jeremiah describes God's appreciation of the Israelites' loyalty during those difficult years: "I remember the kindness of your youth, the love of your marriage, that you followed Me in the wilderness, in a desolate land" (Jeremiah 2:2). God's need, as it were, of Israel, is commemorated in the festival of Sukkot as manifestation of the second divine attribute, that of interdependence. But again, a further divine quality is manifest in this festival, and that is the sixth attribute: *erekh apayim*, God's forbearance and patience. The forty years of wandering in the desert is the result of the people's refusal to enter the land of Israel due to the report of the spies, God's threat to destroy the people, Moses' plea on their behalf, and God's consent to forgive them—but also condemning the entire generation to death

in the desert, due to their unfaithfulness (Numbers 14:1–25). Our observance of Sukkot thus embodies the intense awareness of the divine quality of patience and forbearance.

The holy day of Rosh Hashanah, with its use of the shofar as a call to repentance, provides a critical element in the understanding of God's desire for partnership with the Jewish people. God does not presume that humans are perfect, as the early narratives of the Torah make clear. But God does presume that humans have the capacity to change, to repent for their errors, and to redirect their futures. The essence of our experience of Rosh Hashanah is that if we engage in honest repentance, God will forgive our sins and allow us a second chance to pursue a more noble path in life—thus on Rosh Hashanah, we experience the tenth divine name: *nosei avon*, forgiving iniquity. On Yom Kippur our essential ritual practice is that of the *innuyim*, the varied forms of withdrawal from bodily pleasures (such as fasting), while in antiquity the high priest performed the Temple service in order to purify the sanctuary and achieve atonement for the entire Jewish people (Leviticus 16). The ultimate purpose of this entire process is to restore the fullness of the relationship between God and the Jewish people. This is precisely the experience of the thirteenth divine quality, *nakeih*, in which divine pardon yields the restoration of the full presence of God. There is thus in these two specific layers of holiness of time a rich awareness, achieved through symbolic behaviors related to seven different divine qualities.

A third layer of holiness in time places even greater responsibility on human beings for the actualization of holiness. The singular example of this layer is the law of the Jubilee Year. Here, the Torah neither declares that God invested the time with holiness, nor does it refer to the time of the Jubilee Year as a festival of God. The essential biblical verse enjoins the Jewish people to sanctify the Jubilee Year, which will then be holy unto them: “And you shall make holy the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout the land unto all the inhabitants thereof; it shall be a Jubilee (*yoveil*) unto you” (Leviticus 25:10). Likewise in the one other Torah passage that discusses the Jubilee, the year is

referred to as the “Jubilee of the Israelites” (Numbers 36:4), not as a time holy unto God. In this layer of holiness, then, God neither invests the time with holiness nor partners with humans by initiating the potential for holiness. Instead, there is simply a confirmation that human effort will produce a form of holiness that God personally recognizes and accepts. God commands people to act, and confirms that such autonomous human action will be efficacious in creating holiness.

We will now move on to examine the other three dimensions of holiness found in the Torah, with an eye toward discerning this three-layered pattern of holiness in those realms, as well.

### **Holiness of Persons**

The primary form of holiness of persons present in the Torah is that of Aaron and his sons as priests. The dedication of Aaron and his sons to the service of God in the sanctuary is described in great detail in Exodus 28–29. One essential element in that process of dedication was the sanctification of Aaron and his sons—that is, making them holy. That process appears to be described in stages. First, Moses is commanded to “speak to all who are wise-hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron’s garments to sanctify him, that he may serve as a priest unto Me” (Exodus 28:3). Making the holy garments was obviously a precondition to the process that would lead to the investment of holiness in Aaron and his sons. Next, God says to Moses, “This is what you shall do unto them to make them holy..” (Exodus 29:1), and this is followed by instructions to bathe them (Exodus 29:4), to dress them in the holy garments (Exodus 29:5), and to anoint them with anointing oil (Exodus 29:7). The instructions for the sacrifices which follow (Exodus 29:10–43) are interrupted by a further instruction to sprinkle a mixture of blood and anointing oil on Aaron and his sons, as a result of which “he and his garments shall be holy, and his sons and his sons’ garments with him” (Exodus 29: 21).

However, all of these actions by Moses apparently do not actually complete the process of the hallowing of Aaron and his sons. That comes in a later verse, when God declares, “Aaron and his sons also will I sanctify, to minister to Me as priests” (Exodus 29:44). While all of the human preparation is necessary, it is not sufficient: the ultimate investment of holiness in Aaron and his descendants is by the direct declaration of God. This clear statement of the inception of priestly holiness by divine declaration led the sages to understand that such holiness cannot be abandoned. A *kohen* cannot alter his personal status as a *kohen* by renunciation, or even by violating the laws regulating priestly conduct. A *kohen* can be denied the privileges of his status (for example, if he commits homicide), but even then he remains constrained by the laws that restrict his conduct, such as the restrictions on whom he can marry. And even if a *kohen* violates these laws, his personal status is not changed—even though his male offspring will then be disqualified from the priesthood. As was the case in regard to the holiness of the Sabbath, this first layer of holiness of persons is absolute and inalienable, because it was directly invested by God.

In regard to the realm of holiness of time, we saw that the second of the thirteen divine qualities—that of interdependence with humans—first appeared in the second layer, regarding the holiness of the festivals. In contrast, in the realm of holiness of persons, the quality of interdependence appears in the very first layer. God uses the priests as the medium through which divine blessing is extended to the Jewish people, at the close of every service in the sanctuary (Numbers 6:23–26). God concludes that instruction to the *kohanim* by saying, “And you shall place My name upon Israel, and I will bless them” (Numbers 6:27). But at the same time, the priests are the ultimate enablers of the Jewish people’s worship of God. They conduct the sacrificial rite, through which the nation engages in its regular, ongoing service of God. Thus, this second divine name or quality of interdependence is doubly expressed in the holiness of the priests, and thereby modeled for the entire Jewish people, as the *kohanim* partner both with God and with the people in intimate interdependence.

After the holiness of the priests, the second layer of holiness of persons is the holiness of the entire Jewish people. The language of the Torah in regard to this holiness is quite distinctive: “You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2); similarly: “you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). The clear implication of these verses is that the holiness of the Jewish people was to be achieved by the conduct of the people themselves; it was not fully invested in them by God. Thus, in contrast to the holiness of the *kohanim*, the rest of the Jewish people were invested with potential for holiness—perhaps even some rudimentary level of holiness that might be inalienable—but which requires their own further action in order for their holiness to become fully evolved. This balance between a fragmentary divine investment, on the one hand, and the actualization of its fullness through the necessity of human action, on the other, is reflected in yet another verse: “Verily, you shall keep My Sabbaths, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations—that you may know that I am the Eternal, who sanctifies you” (Leviticus 31:12). This verse acknowledges that God invests the Jewish people with holiness, yet that declaration is linked explicitly with the mandate to observe the divine commandment of the Sabbath.

This is precisely the balance we saw above in the second layer of holiness in time—the holiness of the festivals—in which God had invested a potential for sanctity, which then required human partnership in order to become fully actualized. Here too, then, in regard to the holiness of the Jewish people, there is a similar necessity for partnership between God and people, in order for the fullness of the holiness of these persons to be actualized (although we might also see here, unlike in the realm of holiness in time, that there is the presence of a spark of holiness that can be seen as absolute and inalienable). Beyond the inherent interdependence embedded in the holiness of the Jewish people, there is yet another aspect to the holiness of persons, which finds expression in legislation governing the relationships among fellow Jews: the existence of a duty of

rescue. This means that Jews must not only refrain from doing harm to others (particularly, but not exclusively, to other Jews), but must also rescue others from harm—and this obtains in multiple arenas of interpersonal responsibility, including responsibility for property as well as for physical, emotional, and spiritual health and well-being. For example, the command of “You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:16) imposes the duty to intervene to attempt to rescue the lives of others—even if one did not do anything personally to bring about the situation that is endangering another person’s well-being. The breadth and scope of this duty is reflective of yet another divine quality, embedded in the third divine name, *Elohim*; namely, the value of responsiveness to the danger or distress of others. The legal imposition of such duties (primarily toward fellow Jews, although often toward non-Jews as well) is what the sages describe as duties of *areivut*, which derives from the shared holiness invested by God in the Jewish people.

As with holiness of time, there is likewise a third layer in regard to holiness of persons, wherein God mandates human action to create holiness. In this layer, God neither invests the holiness personally, nor partners with humans in its investment, but simply confirms that holiness has, indeed, been created through human action. Such is the case in the divine command to Moses to prepare Israel for the revelation at Mount Sinai. God says: “Go to the people and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments” (Exodus 19:10). The Torah then confirms that Moses has fulfilled the divine command, as he “went down from the mountain to the people, and he sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes” (Exodus 19:14). In contrast to the two prior layers of holiness of persons, this layer refers to the creation of a form of holiness that is distinctively temporary—in this instance lasting only three days, until the completion of the revelation at Sinai. A further instance of this third layer of holiness of persons is the holiness of the nazirite. Here, too, God neither invests the holiness personally, nor partners with the person in producing the holiness; but again, God does confirm that a form of temporary holiness has been created through

human action: “All the days of his naziriteship he is holy unto the Eternal” (Numbers 6:8, and cf. 6:5). The investment of holiness is the product of the nazirite’s own righteous actions in dedicating himself as a *quasi-kohen*—identifiable by his abstention from wine, his hair growth, and his observance of the priestly purity laws (even though he was not mandated by God to act in such a manner).

One other instance of the temporary holiness of persons is distinct from the two we have discussed, and this is the holiness of the firstborns, which was indeed invested by God personally: “For all the firstborns among the Israelites are Mine, both human and beast; on the day that I smote all the firstborns of the land of Egypt, I sanctified them for Myself” (Numbers 8:17). However, in the very next verse God tells us that the status of the firstborns was revoked, and they were replaced with the tribe of Levi: “I have taken the Levites, instead of all the firstborns among the Israelites” (Numbers 8:18). In contrast to the time-limited holiness of the Israelites at Mount Sinai, and the time-limited holiness of the nazirite, the holiness of the firstborns was invested by God personally and would have been permanently absolute and inalienable, except for God’s own power to terminate that status—which, in fact, was exercised. Strikingly, although the Torah emphasizes the holiness of the firstborns and also reports their replacement by the Levites, there is no indication of investment of holiness in the Levites when they replace the firstborns. God declares that “they are wholly given unto Me, from among the Israelites; instead of all that open the womb, even the firstborns of the Israelites, have I taken them unto Me” (Numbers 8:16). The closing phrase of this verse almost echoes what God had said to Moses earlier concerning the dedication of the firstborns: “Sanctify unto Me all the firstborns; whatever opens the womb among the Israelites, both humans and beast, it is Mine” (Exodus 13:1–2). But in the case of the firstborns, their sanctification was explicitly invested; no such mention of holiness is recorded regarding the Levites.

### Holiness of Objects

There are very few objects that the Torah deems to be holy, all of which have to do with the portable sanctuary (the *mishkan*) built by the Jews in the desert and transported with them into the land of Israel. Here, too, there appear to be three layers of holiness, analogous to the layers we have seen elsewhere.

The primary form of holiness of objects is seen in the divine declaration, “And I will sanctify the tent of meeting and the altar” (Exodus 29:44). As with the sanctity of the priests, here too preliminary actions need to be undertaken by Moses and the people, to construct the objects in response to the God’s command. Thus, Moses had been previously instructed, “Seven days you shall make atonement for the altar and sanctify it, thus shall the altar become most holy” (Exodus 29:37). The objects are constructed by humans in order to be invested with holiness, but the actual investment of sanctity in the objects is done by God personally.

There is a second layer to the holiness of objects, which encompasses all of the objects made for and used in the service of God in the sanctuary. God commands that all of them, including the tent of meeting and the altar of burnt offerings, should be made by Bezalel and his assistants:

...and in the hearts of all that are wise-hearted I have placed wisdom, that they may make all that I have commanded you: the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, the ark-cover that is upon it and all the furniture of the tent; the table and its vessels, the pure candelabrum and all its vessels, and the altar of incense; the altar of burnt offering with all its vessels, and the laver and its base; the plaited garments and the holy garments for Aaron the priest, and the garments of his sons, to minister in the priest’s office; the anointing oil and the incense of sweet spices for the holy place. According to all that I have commanded you, so shall they do. (Exodus 31:6–11)

But in contrast to the tent of meeting and the altar, in which God personally invested sanctity, for all other objects the investment of holiness takes place through the human partnership with God. God indicates the potential for holiness of these utensils, used in the sanctuary service, which is then actualized through the human effort of actually shaping the objects, in accordance with the divine instructions indicating their sacred intent. Thus God declares, regarding all of these utensils: “And you shall sanctify them [the utensils], that they may be most holy” (Exodus 30:29); and, at the culmination of this process, we read: “On the day that Moses had made an end of setting up the tabernacle, and had anointed it and sanctified it, and all the furniture thereof, and the altar and all the vessels thereof, and had anointed them and sanctified them...” (Numbers 7:1). The potential for holiness had then been fully actualized in this partnership between God and persons.

A further instance of this layer of holiness of objects is seen in regard to tithes of agricultural produce and animals, which require actualization by persons designating the particular produce or the particular animal as a tithe. Thus: “All the tithes of the land, whether of the seed of the land or the fruit of the tree, are the Eternal’s, they are holy unto the Eternal. And all tithes of the herd or the flock, whatsoever passes under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Eternal” (Leviticus 27:30, 32). The separation of the tithe is mandated by God, but the investment of holiness is not actualized until the owner of the produce or the animal performs the action of designating the particular produce or animals.

All of these holy objects—including the sanctuary itself, the altar, and all of the implements—were devoted to the sacrificial practice described in Leviticus 1–7. Within those chapters the order of sacrifices is twice presented: once as instructions to the Jewish people, in the ordering of their worship of God (chapters 1–5), and then as instructions to the priests, in their implementation of the divine worship (chapters 6–7). In both instances, there are three sets of offerings that form the essential core of the sacrificial service: the

olah (whole burnt offering), the *hattat* and the *asham* (sin offerings), and the *sh'lamim* (peace offerings). Each of these captures a distinctive aspect of human striving to imitate the divine virtues.

The first kind of sacrifice, the *olah*, embodies an affirmation of the covenantal relationship between the Jewish people and God. The essence of that covenant is rooted in two critical biblical narratives. The first describes the formation of the family of Abraham: God feels the pain of Sarah in her infertility, whereupon Abraham and Sarah learn that a child will be born to them within the next year (Genesis 18:1–15). This divine empathy, the quality of *hannun* (the fifth divine name), is echoed on the national level in the second narrative, as God prepares to take the fledgling nation of Israel out of Egypt. God explains the reason behind the divine liberation as follows: “I have surely seen the affliction of My people that are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their pains” (Exodus 3:7). When Jews, either as a nation or as individuals, offer an *olah* sacrifice, they affirm that the covenantal relationship between themselves and God is founded in that quality of empathy, in the virtue of *hannun* that Israel is duty-bound to emulate. The second kind of sacrifice, the *hattat* and the *asham*, are both offerings designed to restore the relationship with God after some particular sinful conduct on the part of an individual, a community, or the leadership of the nation. The underlying premise of these sacrifices is that a combination of confession of sin and a sacrificial offering will elicit divine forgiveness. As we have noted in discussion of the twelfth divine name, *Nosei Hatt'ah*, God's forgiveness holds individuals accountable for their conduct while still allowing for the restoration of the relationship that had been ruptured by the wrongdoing. Forgiveness is founded in the hope that a person can truly change in the future, and it is that quality that is modeled for us in the experience of offering these sacrifices. The third kind of sacrifice, the *sh'lamim* or peace offering, is an expression of gratitude by an individual toward God—a woman who has given birth, a person who has survived a dangerous situation, or a person who has appeared before God at the sanctuary on a festival. In all of these instances, the sacrifice elicits imitation of God's own virtue of

gratitude, as reflected in the tenth divine name, *Notzeir Heseid La-alafim*, “keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation.” These three forms of offering are the core of sacrificial worship in the sanctuary. The holiness embodied in this worship enables the Jewish people to both experience God’s virtues and to emulate those same virtues in their own lives. Thus, the holiness of objects models for us the divine qualities of empathy, forgiveness (founded in hope), and gratitude.

The third layer of holiness of objects is also related to the sanctuary, and is founded on the principle that any gift to the sanctuary (consisting of either property or a pure animal) becomes holy simply by virtue of being a gift—despite the fact that the gift itself was purely voluntary, and not mandated by God. It is striking that when one makes a vow of money as a gift to the sanctuary, the Torah does not claim that the money itself becomes holy; it notes only that the money has to be in the form of *shekel ha-kodesh*, “the shekel of the sanctuary” (Leviticus 27:3). However, if one vows to give an actual object (such as a pure animal, a house, or land), then the act of giving the gift itself is described with the words *v’ish ki yakdish*, “when a person shall sanctify” (Leviticus 27:14ff.). That is, God did not pre-ordain that any particular animal or property should become sanctified, but human actions have the capacity to invest an animal or piece of property with holiness—analogueous to the capacity of a person to invest holiness in oneself as a nazirite.

It seems clear that the Torah exercised extreme caution in regard to the investment of sanctity in objects. Direct divine investment of holiness in objects pertains exclusively to the structure of the singular sanctuary and its major altar. Even the second layer, the partnership between God and persons to produce holiness in objects, pertains exclusively to the remaining objects that were commanded to be constructed as the instruments of service in that sanctuary. And in the third layer, wherein persons have the capacity to initiate holiness in objects, they could do so only in the form of gifts to the sanctuary, which then came under the exclusive control of the priests and Levites. It is reasonable to assume that this constrained

investment of holiness in objects was part of the Torah's design to reduce the likelihood of idolatrous conduct, which might result from widespread use of sanctified objects by the population as a whole. It is not hard to see the possibility of popular veneration of household sancta leading to worship of those same objects as either deities or as representations of deities.

### **Holiness of Place**

The concluding verses of the Song at the Sea, the poem that the Jewish people sang after they were saved at the Sea of Reeds, speak prophetically of the direction in which God is leading the people. God directs them toward the place where the divine home, God's own (sacred) sanctuary, will be established: "You will bring them in and will plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance: the place, Eternal, that You have made for Yourself to dwell in, the sanctuary of the Eternal (*mikdash Adonai*), which Your hands have established" (Exodus 15:17). This verse points to the merger of the holiness of the sanctuary-as-object with the holiness of the place where that sanctuary will be permanently located. Thus the sages immediately link the phrase *mikdash Adonai* of this verse with the occurrence of the same word in the divine command of Exodus 25:8, "You shall make for Me a sanctuary (*mikdash*), and I will reside among them" (cf. B. Ketubot 62b).

Indeed, after the construction of the portable sanctuary in the book of Exodus, which was to travel with the people in the desert, the book of Deuteronomy indicates nearly two dozen separate times that God intends to locate that sanctuary at a particular place, to be chosen by God. Thus, for example, after the command for Israel to destroy, upon their entry into the land of Canaan, the multiple local places of idolatrous worship that existed there, God mandates that proper divine worship through sacrifices and offerings be done exclusively at the place to be designated as the location of the sanctuary:

Only the place that the Eternal your God shall choose out of all your tribes to place the divine name there—that habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come. There you shall bring your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, your tithes and the offerings of your hand, your vows and your freewill offerings, the firstlings of your herd and of your flock. And there you shall eat before the Eternal your God, and you shall rejoice in all that you put your hand to—you and your households, with which the Eternal your God has blessed you. (Deuteronomy 12:5–7)

In numerous additional verses in Deuteronomy,<sup>16</sup> the Torah emphasizes that God will select a permanent place as the location of the sanctuary. And, in nine of those instances, that will be the place where God's name “will be placed,” or “will rest.”<sup>17</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that the rabbinic tradition was unequivocal about the nature of the holiness of the place where the Temple eventually stood. As the Mishnah testifies, the divine sanctification of this place “made it [i.e., the Temple Mount] holy for its time [i.e., while the Temple stood], as well as for all future time” (M. Eiduyot 8:6). As we have seen with the other three domains of holiness, here too do we see something similar regarding holiness of place: in the first layer, the sanctity of the Temple Mount was purely the result of divine investment of holiness in that place and is therefore absolute and inalienable. To this day—despite the fact that the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed more than nineteen centuries ago, and despite dispute as to exactly where the Temple stood—there is no debate in Jewish law about the continued holiness of that specific place, with the result that ritually impure people are forbidden from walking there.

The identification of the *makom kadosh*, the holy place, with the location of the portable sanctuary, the Tent of Meeting, is made explicit in three instances in the Torah. For example, in regard to the priests eating the remainder of the meal offering accompanying the

daily sacrifice, we read: “And that which is left of it, Aaron and his sons shall eat; it shall be eaten as unleavened bread in a holy place (*makom kadosh*); in the court of the tent of meeting they shall eat it” (Leviticus 6:9).<sup>18</sup> In six subsequent places the Torah simply refers to activities taking place “in the holy place,”<sup>19</sup> relying on our understanding that this refers to the location of the portable sanctuary (until its permanent location will be divinely selected—at which point in time there will be only that single, absolutely holy place).

A second layer of holiness of place is reflected in the verse, “You in Your love lead the people whom You have redeemed; You guide them in Your strength to Your holy habitation (*el n'veih kodshékha*)” (Exodus 15:13, cf. commentary of Rashbam ad loc.). While this verse is the sole explicit assertion in the Torah of the holiness of the land of Israel, the sages seem to have arrived at far-reaching implications based on the nuances of the verse itself. Firstly, the Mishnah asserts that the entire land of Israel is holy<sup>20</sup>—albeit granting that the holiness of the entire country is the lowest of the ten degrees of holiness that are manifest within the land. That is to say: the entire land is the base upon which ever-higher degrees of holiness can become manifest, ultimately leading to the highest degree of holiness possible, as we would expect, within the sanctuary at the place of the holy of holies.

The way the Mishnah expresses the holiness of the land of Israel is itself of great significance. It says:

There are ten degrees of holiness. The land of Israel is holier than all [other] lands. And what [constitutes] its holiness? [That] they bring the omer from it, and the first fruits and the two loaves, which they may not bring from [any of] the [other] lands (M. Keilim 1:6.).

The Mishnah teaches that the holiness of the land depends on the actions of the Jewish people, in bringing national offerings to the sanctuary. This understanding may already be implied in the language of the biblical verse cited above, which may be read to imply that the

holiness of the divine “habitation” depends on the prior arrival of the people, whom God has redeemed, so that they may be settled there. In fact, this seems to be the central assumption of the talmudic assertion that the holiness of the land of Israel was actualized not by divine decree, but rather by the arrival of the Jewish people and their conquest of the land under Joshua, and their resultant settlement in the land (B. Arakhin 32b). While an alternative understanding is considered, it is precisely this assumption that led the sages to conclude that, upon the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jewish people from their land, the very holiness of land itself was nullified. Furthermore, the restoration of the holiness of the land was only achieved when the Jews returned to the land and rebuilt the Temple under the leadership of Ezra.

This rabbinic teaching is strikingly different from that of the Mishnah, dealing with the holiness of the place of the Temple itself. There, the law was clear that even the destruction of the Temple would leave God’s chosen place invested with holiness—precisely because God personally had invested that location with holiness in choosing it as the permanent location of the sanctuary. By contrast, the holiness of the rest of the land was invested by God only with potential for holiness, which needed to be actualized by the Jewish people through their own efforts: initially their conquest and settlement of the land, and later their conduct in bringing the produce of the land to the Temple according to the divine command.

It is in this manner that the rabbis must have understood the passage in Leviticus in which, after warning the people not to engage in any forms of sexual immorality or child sacrifice, God issues a powerful threat that such conduct will result in the land becoming impure and vomiting them out:

You shall not defile yourselves by any of things—for the nations, whom I am sending away from before you, have defiled themselves with all these things. And the land became defiled, and I visited its sin upon it, and the land

vomited out its inhabitants. But as for you, you shall observe My statutes and My ordinances, and you shall not do anything like these abominations—neither the citizen nor the stranger who sojourns among you. For the people of the land who preceded you committed all of these abominations, and the land became defiled. And let the land not vomit you out for having defiled it, as it vomited out the nation that preceded you. (Leviticus 18: 24–28)

The sages must have understood that it is the very holiness of the land that could not tolerate the impurity of grossly immoral behavior—that is, the actualization and maintenance of the holiness of the land is contingent upon the continued obedience of the Jewish people to the commandments.

The holiness of the Land of Israel, first actualized through the conquest under Joshua, ended with the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the people from the land. This was not the case with the second actualization of the holiness of the land at the time of Ezra. That investment of holiness in the land was, according to the sages, never completely terminated, but remained “eternally sanctified.”<sup>21</sup> However, as we have noted in regard to the second layer of holiness of persons (that is, the holiness of the Jewish people), this element of continuous or ongoing sanctity is only partial. In regard to the Jewish people as a whole, the partial sanctity needs to be fully actualized by the ongoing conduct of the people. And here, in regard to the sanctity of the land, it too can only be fully actualized by the conduct of the people: specifically, by the actual settlement of the land—that is, by the arrival of the majority of the Jews of the world in the land of Israel. Maimonides speaks almost prophetically about this matter:

In the present era, even in the areas settled by the Jews who came from Babylonia, even those [settled] in the era of Ezra, [the obligation to separate] *t'rumah* does not have the status of a scriptural commandment, but merely that of a rabbinic decree. [The rationale is that] the scriptural [commandment to separate] *t'rumah* applies only in *eretz yisrael* and only

when the entire Jewish people are located there. [This is derived from the phrase] “When you enter...” [Implied is that] the entire [Jewish people] must enter [the land], as they did when they took possession of the land originally and as will happen in the future when they take possession of the land a third time. In contrast, the second time [the people] took possession of the land, in the time of Ezra, only a portion entered. Hence, they were not obligated according to scriptural law. Similarly, it appears to me that the same concept applies with regard to the tithes. In the present era, this obligation [as well] has the status of a rabbinic decree like *t’rumah*.<sup>22</sup>

The holiness of place, for both the *mikdash* and the entire land, carries symbolic significance regarding two fundamental divine virtues. First, the very fact that God fulfilled the promise to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham was an act of *hesed*, kindness exceeding reasonable expectations (the seventh divine name). That is exactly why the Jewish people insisted that they could not succeed in entering the land, that such an attempt was doomed from the outset and would be impossible to achieve (Numbers 14:1–3). And that is why Moses’ response to the people was, “If God desires [that for] us, then God will bring us into this land and give it to us” (Numbers 14:7). And, in turn, that is why God’s response was, “How long will this people despise Me? How long will they not believe in Me, despite all the signs that I have wrought among them?!” (Numbers 14:11). This exchange is reminiscent of the moment of God’s informing Abraham, and Sarah overhearing, that they would have a child together, and Sarah’s apparently disbelieving laughter in response (Genesis 18:9–12). God’s response to her was, “Is anything too wondrous for the Eternal [to do]?” (Genesis 18:14). In both of these instances, humans respond to the magnitude of a promised divine kindness with disbelief. In both instances—but particularly in the situation of the promise to give the holy land of Israel to the holy people whom God had chosen—God insists that the divine capacity for kindness exceeds human imagination. That is precisely the divine quality of *hesed*: the fact that God’s ability

to meet those needs far exceeds what humans would consider to be reasonable expectations. To imitate this divine quality, which is embedded in the symbolic holiness of the land of Israel, we are asked to transcend the perception of our own limitations in performing acts of kindness for our fellow humans.

Later in the narrative of the spies, we find Moses' plea to God to forgive the people. Moses offers a number of different reasons why God should forgive them, rather than destroy them and start over again with Moses himself. His concluding plea is that God should forgive the people because God should act in consonance with the divine virtues, the eleventh of which is *nosei pesha* (Numbers 14:13–19). We had noted previously that the term *pesha* connotes actions that manifest betrayal of personal relationships (including betrayal of the covenant with God). In fact, Moses describes the refusal of the Jews to follow the instruction to enter the land as an act of *pesha*, but he pleads with God to forgive them nevertheless. God does consent to forgive the people, manifesting divine humility, but still holds them accountable for their conduct and condemns all Jewish adults to death in the desert over the next thirty-eight years. This pattern of divine conduct—forgiving with humility, while still holding the wrongdoers accountable for sinful behavior and administering punishment for such conduct—becomes the central function of the service in the Temple in Jerusalem, the sanctuary at the holy place chosen by God. That very place came to embody this divine quality: the awareness that humility demands that forgiveness be granted (even for sins of betrayal), but that justice nevertheless demands that wrongdoers be punished for the sinful behavior. Thus two fundamental divine attributes, *rav hesed* and *nosei pesha*, are symbolically embodied in the Jewish experience of the holiness of the Temple Mount, as well as the holiness of the land of Israel.

The third layer of holiness of place is exemplified by the temporary holiness of Mount Sinai. God instructed Moses to warn the Jewish people against actually ascending the mountain during God's appearance on it, and Moses responded that no such additional warning was needed, since God had already instructed Moses to "set bounds

around the mount and sanctify it” (Exodus 19:23). But God instructs Moses nevertheless to command the people not to ascend, and Moses does so. Moses clearly assumes that the people would understand that designating the mountain as holy would preclude them from intruding upon it. God apparently does not share this assumption and therefore demands that Moses explicitly instruct the people not to enter the area during God’s revelation. Moses then complies: “So Moses went down to the people and told them” (Exodus 19:25). The holiness of Mount Sinai is never referred to as an investment of holiness by God personally, nor does the Torah ever indicate that Mount Sinai is holy unto God. Rather, God commands Moses to sanctify the mountain by engaging in actions and speech that demonstrate the distinctively holy character of that place for a limited period of time—namely, the time that God’s presence will be manifest there as the people enter into covenant with the Divine. Moses had assumed that it would be self-evident that a holy place should be entered only by the spiritual elite (himself and Aaron), but that belief seems to be repudiated by God, who declares that it is only in this instance that the masses must keep their distance. Indeed, when the sanctuary is later constructed, God specifically desires that the entire people be able to experience the divine presence among them: “And you shall make for Me a sanctuary so that I may dwell among them” (Exodus 25:8).

### **Conclusion**

In each of the four dimensions of holiness—time, persons, objects, and place—there are three distinct layers of holiness. The first layer is holiness that is absolute and inalienable, because it has been fully invested by God personally. The second layer is holiness in which the potential is invested by God, but actualizing that potential fully depends on people entering into partnership with God. The third layer of holiness may be authorized or even commanded by God, but its full investment—the words and actions that are then necessitated by, and reflective of, that holiness—is executed by persons. The following chart summarizes the three layers of each of the four dimensions of symbolic holiness found in the Torah:

| Holiness<br>God<br>Leviticus 19:2   |  |   |  |  |
|---|--|---|--|--|
|   | Time                                     | Persons                                   | Objects  | Place  |
| potential and<br>actualization by God:<br><br><i>inalienable</i>                                    | Shabbat<br><br>(Genesis 2:3)             | Priests<br><br>(Exodus<br>29:44)          | Tabernacle<br>and Altar<br><br>(Exodus<br>29:44)                 | Location of<br>Temple<br><br>(Exodus<br>15:17,<br>Deuteronomy<br>12:5-7) |
| potential by God,<br>actualization by<br>humans:<br><br><i>alienable by<br/>human conduct</i>       | Festivals<br><br>(Leviticus<br>23:2, 4)  | Jewish People<br><br>(Leviticus<br>19:12) | Sanctuary<br>Implements<br><br>(Exodus<br>30:29,<br>Numbers 7:1) | Land of Israel<br><br>(Exodus<br>15:13, Leviticus<br>18:24-28)           |
| potential by God,<br>declaration and<br>actualization by<br>humans:<br><br><i>rare or temporary</i> | Jubilee Year<br><br>(Leviticus<br>25:10) | Nazirite<br><br>(Numbers<br>6:5, 8)       | Tithes<br><br>(Leviticus<br>27:30, 32)                           | Mount Sinai<br><br>(Exodus<br>19:23)                                     |

What, then, is the meaning of the holiness that is embodied in these symbolic times, persons, objects, and places? Each of these manifestations of holiness is a symbolic expression through which one or more of the virtues expressed in the thirteen divine attributes is brought to our attention, so that we may become aware of our duty to imitate those qualities and transmit them to the following generations.

The divine virtues embedded in the symbolic expressions of holiness are as follows:<sup>23</sup>

***Holiness of Time:***

The Sabbath. Virtue #1, the Tetragrammaton (“Adonai”), represents the value of productivity—of being purposefully productive in the material world.

**The Festivals.**

Passover. Virtue #4, the divine name *Rahum* (“merciful”), obviously related to the word *rehem*, meaning womb) represents the quality of extending unearned love.

Shavuot. Virtue #8, the divine name *Emet* (“truth”), represents the virtue of trustworthiness.

Sukkot. Virtue #6, the divine name *Erekb Apayim* (“long-suffering”) represents the virtue of patience (forbearance), the capacity to postpone acting even in the face of strong emotions such as anger.

Rosh Hashanah. Virtue #10, the divine name *Nosei Avon* (“forgiving iniquity”), means that God will both exact punishment for degraded conduct (*avon*) but also forgive, granting a second chance to pursue a more noble path.

Yom Kippur. Virtue #13, the divine name *Nakeih* (“acquitting”), represents the idea of pardon in the framework of justice: God will await repentance and, when that occurs, will restore the divine presence.

***Holiness of Persons:***

The Priests. Virtue #2, the second divine name, is a repetition of the Tetragrammaton (“Adonai”), which here represents the value of interdependence.

The Jewish People. Virtue #3, the divine name *El* (“God”), represents the value of responsiveness to the danger or distress of others.

***Holiness of Objects:*****The Mishkan, Altar, and the Sanctuary Implements.**

The olah. Virtue #5, the divine name *Hannun* (“gracious”), is an expression of the virtue of empathy, the ability to share the feelings of joy and pain of another.

The *hattat* and the *asham*. Virtue #12, the divine name *Nosei Hattah* (“forgiving sin”), represents the quality of hope, which makes it both necessary and possible for God to forgive (albeit again with accountability) the broad base of wrongful conduct that is, as it were, the norm of human existence, which needs to be governed and moderated but which can never be fully extirpated.

The *sh'lamim*. Virtue #9, the divine name *notzeir hesed la-alafim* (“keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation”) is an expression of the virtue of gratitude.

***Holiness of Places:***

The Temple. Virtue #11, the divine name *Nosei Pesha* (“forgiving transgression”), indicates that God bears that same quality of holding accountable but forgiving, even in relation to sins that are rooted in and manifest personal betrayal of the covenantal relationship—due to the presence in God of the additional quality of humility.

The Land of Israel. Virtue #7, the divine name *Rav Hessed* (“abundant in goodness”), is a compound phrase that presents God as acting to satisfy human needs (*hesed*), in a manner that exceeds reasonable expectations (*rav*).

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The challenges that confront us in the modern era are the same as those that have confronted Jews throughout our history. How can we be constantly conscious of the divine virtues in which the holiness of God personally is expressed? How can we use the symbolic models of holiness with which the Torah provides us? How can we sustain an awareness of the ways in which every law of the Torah moves us to integrate those same qualities in our personalities, to actualize them in our conduct in the real world, and to transmit them passionately to the next generation of Jews?

These are the questions that matter. And it is only through a recognition of God's *k'dushah*, and our own commitment to strive to emulate these divine qualities in our own lives, that we can begin to answer these questions.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., the sources listed by Theodore Friedman, Baruch A. Levine, and Eliezer Schweid in their essay on holiness in the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), vol. 12, pp. 50–56. The essay is entitled “Kedushah.”

<sup>2</sup> *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*, positive commandment #8. The talmudic passage referenced is B. Sotah 14a.

<sup>3</sup> M.T. Hilkhot Dei'ot 1:5–7 (emphasis added).

<sup>4</sup> This rendering is based on the 1917 JPS translation of the biblical passage, with a slight modification in the thirteenth name to conform with rabbinic understanding.

<sup>5</sup> Note that his name is still “Abram,” at this point in the biblical narrative.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Exodus 33:19 and Deuteronomy 13:18.

<sup>7</sup> Some examples of this kind of (non-divine) *hesed* include the kindness done by the angels to Lot (Genesis 19:19), requested by Abraham from Sarah (Genesis 20:13), done by Avimelekh to Abraham (Genesis 21:23), requested by Abraham’s servant from Laban (Genesis 24:49), requested by Joseph from the butler by Joseph (Genesis 40:14), and requested of Joseph by Jacob (Genesis 47:29.)

<sup>8</sup> B. Kiddushin 32b.

<sup>9</sup> With respect to the latter category, cf., e.g., Deuteronomy 27:7.

<sup>10</sup> See Rambam’s *Guide to the Perplexed* I 54.

<sup>11</sup> See commentary of Nahmanides to Exodus 34:7, ed. Chavel (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1959), vol. 1, p. 523.

<sup>12</sup> Hirsch, *Commentary to the Pentateuch* (trans. Isaac Levy; 3rd edition [London: Isaac Levy, 1967], pp. 650–651) is here following a suggestion of Rabbi Eleazar in the Talmud (B. Yoma 87a).

<sup>13</sup> Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati (1250–1310), one of the great rabbinic authors of medieval Italy, is cited in Chavel’s footnotes to Nahmanides’ commentary (see note 10 above).

<sup>14</sup> Cf., e.g., Deuteronomy 19:10, 21:8, and 27:25.

<sup>15</sup> Cf., e.g., the Mekhilta, Bo 12, or the introduction to *B’sballah*, s.v. *va-hamushim*.

<sup>16</sup> See Deuteronomy 12:5–7, 11–12, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23–24, 25; 15:20; 16:2, 6–7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10, 15; 18:6, 23:17, 26:2; and 31:11.

<sup>17</sup> Deuteronomy 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23–24; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 11; and 26:2.

<sup>18</sup> The other two instances of this explicit identification are Leviticus 6:19 and Exodus 29:30–31.

<sup>19</sup> Leviticus 6:20, 7:6, 10:13 and 17, 16:24, and 24:9.

<sup>20</sup> M. Keilim 1:6–9.

<sup>21</sup> M.T. Hilkhot Terumot 1:5.

<sup>22</sup> M.T. Hilkhot Terumot 1:26, trans. Eliyahu Touger (Jerusalem and New York:

Moznaim Publishing, 2005), p. 214. The Hebrew *t'rumah* denotes the special produce tax owed by farmers to the landless priestly caste. The phrase "when you enter" is not obviously used in Scripture with reference to *t'rumah*, but Rambam seems to be citing Numbers 15:18 in light of the discussion in the Talmud at B. Ketubot 25a.

<sup>23</sup> The virtues themselves are, as noted above: (1) Adonai, (2) Adonai, (3) God, (4) merciful and (5) gracious, (6) long-suffering and (7) abundant in goodness and (8) truth; (9) keeping mercy unto the thousandth generation, (10) forgiving iniquity (11) and transgression (12) and sin, and (13) acquitting.