

Separation or Engagement?
***Imitatio Dei* and The Nature of Holiness**

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The Eternal said to Moses: Speak to the entire congregation of Israel and tell them, “You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2)¹

For I, the Eternal, am your God, and you shall sanctify yourselves and you shall be holy, for I am holy....You shall be holy, for I am holy. (Leviticus 11:44–45)

You shall be holy to me, for I the Eternal am holy, and I have set you apart from other people to be mine. (Leviticus 20:26)

If asked to define “holiness,” a knowledgeable Jew is likely to invoke the idea, advanced by our sages, that *kadosh* means *parush*, “separated.”² Thus, for example, the Jewish people are called a *goy kadosh* (Exodus 19:6), meaning that they will be or, rather, should be—separate and apart.³ Likewise, the priests are called *k’doshim* (e. g., at Leviticus 21:6–8); and the Sabbath is holy because it is so distinct from other days. The imperative for Jews to be *k’doshim*, therefore—whether this is taken as a command to individuals or as a command to the people as a whole—may be taken as mandating separation from certain aspects of the world. We might next ask, “What is it

that enables the Jewish people (and/or its individual members) to achieve the separation that constitutes *k'dushab*?" The answer, it would seem, is this: adhering to divine laws—especially prohibitions. Jews may even be expected to go beyond these prohibitions, and refrain even from permissible activities. "Sanctify yourself in that which is permitted to you."⁴

K'dushab, then, entails separation. Yet, notwithstanding this widely known association, some thinkers, especially in contemporary times, often speak of Judaism (and *halakhah* in particular) as mandating engagement with the world, active participation in its affairs. We often speak of "sanctifying the mundane." This motto is most naturally taken as identifying engagement with the mundane, rather than separation and withdrawal, as the means for attaining holiness.⁵ In short, Jewish explications of holiness or sanctity exhibit an intriguing polarity or dialectic—separation yet engagement.

Which model should we adopt? Are both valid? Should one carry more weight than the other? How shall we understand the relevant notions of separation and engagement? What implications do they carry for Jewish societies in our times? This essay will explore these questions by probing the foundations of each conception of *k'dushab* (separation and engagement) along with their respective weaknesses. My main text will be Leviticus 19:2 (quoted above) and rabbinic materials that interpret it and similar verses.⁶

We live in a time in which, arguably, the theme of separation dominates traditional Jewish life. My thesis is that once we assign weight to the notion of *imitatio Dei* as presented in the verses with which we began ("for I, the Eternal your God, am holy"), the separation view and the engagement view may be understood, as several authorities posit, as reflecting two aspects of God. Both aspects must be imitated, and to focus exclusively on separation is to overlook a key theme of the Torah's presentation of *k'dushab*—namely, *imitatio Dei*. Moreover, I will argue that engagement is in some respects a clearer form of *imitatio Dei* than is separation,

although a certain looseness remains in linking *k'dushab* to emulation of God.

A word on method. In approaching Leviticus 19:2, it is from one point of view best to focus on the biblical text in the interest of arriving at its *p'shat*, and to set aside those midrashic interpretations that lack clear textual proof and that may be designed purely for moralistic purposes. Nevertheless, although capturing *p'shat* in the biblical verses is important, if our interest is in examining what Judaism has to say about *k'dushab*, we cannot embrace a sola *Scriptura* approach. We cannot eschew interweaving the biblical text with later aggadic and halakhic interpretations, from the sages of the rabbinic period to Maimonides to Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and beyond. Judaism is dynamic, not static; and, as Rashbam observed, new interpretations appear every day that become part of our interpretive tradition.⁷

I

In his valuable and bold essay “*imitatio Dei* and the Idea of Holiness,” Leon Roth (1896–1963) argues that “wherever in Scripture man is called upon to be holy in the way that God is holy, the substance of such summons is negative, and never positive.”⁸ Roth cites a slew of biblical verses that connect *k'dushab* specifically to negative prohibitions, the category of *lo ta'aseh*.⁹ A negative prohibition clearly is a call to separation. Arguably, therefore—and as Roth in fact does argue—*k'dushab* primarily entails refraining from certain deeds and thoughts. Roth summarizes: “Holiness is essentially a negative concept.”¹⁰

The case for this “negative” separation approach is far from airtight. After all, the commandments in Leviticus 19 that immediately follow the command *k'doshim tihyu* include the imperatives to fear parents and to observe the Sabbath—both, ostensibly, positive commandments. Roth attempts to analyze these duties as negative

commandments, but his analysis is not altogether convincing.¹¹ In addition, it is precisely before the Ten Commandments were given that God charged the Jewish people with becoming “a kingdom of priests [i.e., a people that serves God] and a *holy nation*” (Exodus 19:6). Accordingly, numerous commentators, following the midrash, state that the imperatives in Leviticus 19 are in essence a reformulation of the Ten Commandments.¹² Taking note of the words in Leviticus 19:2, “Speak to all the congregation of Israel,” the sages remark: “This portion was said *b’hak-heil*”—that is, Leviticus 19 was addressed to all of Israel, just as the Torah was revealed to all at Sinai.¹³

What impact does the association of Leviticus 19 with the revelation at Sinai have on Roth’s thesis? Well, it is true that the Ten Commandments are mostly negative. But according to Maimonides and others, the first commandment, “I am the Eternal your God,” is a positive command to believe in God or rather (to put it accurately) to know God’s existence (i.e., to be able to prove it)¹⁴—although, to be sure, others take it as a prologue rather than as a commandment unto itself. Furthermore, although the fourth commandment as stated in Exodus 20 conveys a negative aspect of Shabbat (cessation of labor) and on a purely literal level merely a positive mental aspect (“remember”), from a broader halakhic perspective, which includes rabbinic legislation, Shabbat obviously includes positive aspects such as honoring and enjoying Shabbat, eating three meals, and reciting Kiddush. (The sages regarded the Shabbat commandment in Exodus and its counterpart in Deuteronomy as complementary positive and negative aspects, “stated in one utterance.”) It could be argued that although the positive rabbinic laws obviously apply to the Sabbath, the biblical stress on the negative aspects supports Roth to an extent. But what of the fifth commandment, “honor your father and mother”? That seems to imply a positive duty, alongside any negative ban against disrespect. In short, the attempt to associate *kidushah* exclusively with negative imperatives is unconvincing. Roth’s observation, then, is predominantly but not entirely correct for Leviticus 19, and is even more problematic if we link Leviticus 19 to the Ten Commandments as the sages do.¹⁵

However, there is another problem as well—one that will occupy us for the rest of this essay.

II

Leviticus 19:2 reads: “Speak to the entire congregation of Israel and tell them, ‘You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy.’” In these words, as well as those quoted earlier from Leviticus 11:44 and 20:26, we have the theme of *imitatio Dei*: *k’doshim tihyu* is a command to be like God. This is how Abba Shaul construes Leviticus 19:2: “The retinue of a monarch, what must it do? Imitate the monarch.”¹⁶ Thus, the Israelites should be holy because God is holy. So too, in another midrash: “As I am *kadosh*, you shall be *k’doshim*; as I am *parush*, you shall be *p’rushim*.”¹⁷

But how can that be the case? How can mastery over egocentric drives be an act of emulating God? God has no egocentric drives! And how does a person’s refraining from worshipping idols, crossbreeding animals, sowing with two kinds of seed, wearing *shaatnez*, eating fruit before a certain time elapses, consuming blood, removing certain hairs on the head, and allowing a daughter to become a prostitute—all of which (and more) appear in Leviticus 19—how does observing these prohibitions help us to resemble the Divine?¹⁸

This problem—how does *imitatio Dei* operate in the case of holiness, given that it is unclear how God could observe the commandments in Leviticus 19—hounds explanations given by the commentators. For instance, Rashi and others maintain that *k’doshim tihyu* refers to abstaining from the forbidden sexual relations itemized in Leviticus 18. Yet how could we ascribe that type of separation to God?¹⁹ Or consider the sages’ declaration, “Sanctify yourself with that which is permitted to you.”²⁰ With this formula they expand *k’dushah* to include separating oneself even from technically permitted acts. Elaborating on their thesis, Nahmanides famously explains that, although the Torah has no specific laws against being a glutton or

drunkard, or using foul language, or indulging in abundant sex with one's wife, such behavior nonetheless violates the prescription of *k'doshim tihyu*.²¹ Yet given this interpretation of holiness, how are we to imitate God? Surely it is odd, if not bizarre, to think of God as observing or not observing such extra restraint. We therefore have a tension between the idea of *k'dushah* as separation, on the one hand, and the idea that achieving *k'dushah* constitutes *imitatio Dei*, on the other hand.

In truth—and rather obviously—the *imitatio Dei* problem is not confined to prohibitions, but extends to positive commandments as well. Consider Maimonides. In the prologue to his *Sefer Hamitzvot* (Book of Commandments), where he enumerates the 613 commandments using a rigorous set of principles for inclusion and exclusion, Maimonides refuses to list “Be holy” as a commandment unto itself. Rather, for him, *k'doshim tihyu* encompasses all 613 commandments. Divine instructions to “be holy” are “charges to fulfill the whole Torah, as if God were saying, ‘Be holy by doing all that I have commanded you to do, and guard against all things I have enjoined you from doing.’” Indeed, Maimonides states: “There is no difference between [God] saying, ‘You shall be holy’ and ‘Obey My commandments.’”²² Like Rashi, Maimonides has his own support from the classical sages—in this case, a Sifrei text that states, “And you shall be holy’ [Numbers 15:40]—this refers to the holiness of all the commandments (*k'dushat kol ha-mitzvot*).”²³ For Maimonides, to be holy is simply to perform the commandments. Warren Zev Harvey nicely explains Maimonides’ view as follows: when we fulfill the *mitzvot* of the Holy One, we are holy.²⁴ Maimonides reiterates his understanding of *k'doshim tihyu* in his *Guide for the Perplexed*,²⁵ asserting that the purpose of all *mitzvot* is to “quell the impulses of matter.”²⁶ In this latter conception of the teleology of *mitzvot*, he does not distinguish between lusting for illicit sex or non-kosher food, on the one hand, and desiring to harm one’s comrade for personal gain, on the other. *All* of the *mitzvot* require us, to some degree, to escape corporeality—“the impulses of matter.”²⁷ Holiness involves *all* commandments.²⁸ This homogenization of the ritual and

the ethical fits well with the fact that Leviticus 19 mixes the ritual and the ethical with no distinction, just as in the Torah portion Ki Teitzei (Deuteronomy 21:10-25:19).

But once again our question rears its head. God does not perform the commandments, and certainly not all of them. Where, then, is the imitation? If we interpret “Be holy” as relating to *mitzvot*, whether positive or negative, we ostensibly have no way to analogize between human holiness and divine holiness.

Harvey notes that when we interpret the Bible, and in particular when we interpret anthropomorphic expressions such as “God’s face” or “God descended,” we employ the principle that “the Torah speaks in the language of human beings,” in order to blunt the implication that God has a body. God is designated by terms predicated of human beings that humans can understand. “There is, however,” writes Harvey, “one exception to this anthropomorphic pattern...in which God is not designated by the language of man, but man according to the language of God... ‘[H]oly’ designates God primarily and created things only by extension.”²⁹ If so, the meaning of *k’dushah* for human beings and for God could be different. But *ki kadosh ani* (“for I am holy”) cannot then be understood; we would not know what to imitate! This problem with fathoming God’s *k’dushah* is intensified by the sages when they say, “My [God’s] *k’dushah* is higher than yours.”³⁰

Let us consider some responses to this problem.

III

The responses to the *imitatio Dei* problem that I consider in this section will assume the “separation” understanding of *k’dushah*. In later sections we will see how the “engagement” view addresses the questions we have posed.

Approach #1

The first strategy for explaining *imitatio Dei* is to assert that the resemblance between human and divine holiness is merely an analogy, and a loose one at that, even verging on metaphor. The resemblance is grounded in God's transcendence. God is *metaphysically* "apart" and transcendent, unique, wholly other, utterly different; we, as individuals and as a people, are "apart" and "transcendent" in a different way. Our acts of separation, of refraining from certain acts, are but rough analogues of God's metaphysical transcendence, but analogues nonetheless.³¹

Now, there is some logic in this idea, since when we remove ourselves from the world and control biological appetites, we in a sense separate ourselves from the material world—we are becoming transcendent. So the idea "Master your drives, because I am metaphysically transcendent" makes *some* sense. But the analogy may simply be too weak and tenuous to ground an imperative for humans to be transcendent on the grounds of *imitatio Dei* alone.³² This is, in fact, Roth's somewhat despairing response. The *imitatio Dei* principle cannot really be applied to *k'dushab*, he avers, since God does not have the obligations that humans have. Rather, *imitatio Dei* is invoked only *l'tiferet ha-musar*—that is, as "window dressing" (the phrase is that of the translator of Roth's essay), an adornment to Jewish obligations. In sum, one approach to our problem at hand is to capitulate: the resemblance is not strong, after all.

Approach #2

A second strategy is to shift attention away from God's transcendence (where the analogy between God and humans is weak) to God's immanence. God is transcendent and yet also immanent in the world, as brought out in the famous contrast set out in the prophetic verse familiar from the liturgy: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Hosts [i.e., transcendence]; the earth is full of God's glory [i.e., immanence]"

(Isaiah 6:3). Any analogy between human and divine holiness must take immanence into account—and perhaps the appeal to immanence will provide a more cogent understanding of *imitatio Dei*.

This last point has been pursued by several commentators. Rabbi Meir Leibush Malbim argues, in his commentary to Leviticus 19:2, that whenever we conquer our natures (as we do through observing *mitzvot*) we come to resemble the God who exerts control over nature and can interfere with its workings, altering their normal course. This is one point of comparison, and Malbim sees another as well. Malbim understands the notion that humanity was created *b'tzelem elohim* (in the image of God) to mean that we possess free will. Human beings exercise free will over their “small chariot” (namely: the body), in a way that is not subject to and determined by laws of nature. In this way human beings, in Abba Shaul’s words, “imitate the Sovereign.” Elsewhere, Malbim adds that since God does only good, human beings are like God only when they do good.³³

Thus for Malbim, the imitation of God’s holiness is imitation of divine immanence, to *the exclusion* of divine transcendence.³⁴ Malbim is also interested in explaining a rabbinic passage that addresses whether God’s holiness *depends upon* human holiness.³⁵ His interpretation of this odd passage is that God will interfere with nature—that is, perform miracles for Israel—only when Israel conquers its material nature and performs *mitzvot*. In this sense, God’s holiness (=immanence) depends on ours, even though God’s inherent holiness does not.

Malbim’s shift from transcendence to immanence as the locus of *k'dushah* resembles the view, prevalent since the nineteenth century, that *k'dushah* demands engagement with the world in the form of activity to better the world.³⁶ Malbim’s view is not quite the same as this one, however, because Malbim stresses two elements that are not salient in the engagement view: humanity’s conquest of material nature, and God’s working miracles.

A weakness in Malbim's account, perhaps, is that not all *mitzvot* truly conquer material urges. There is no natural "urge" to wear *shaatnez*, for example. But a deeper problem is that once again the analogy is loose, since there is no conquering of urges where God is concerned. Thus, while Malbim's account makes a contribution toward unraveling the imitation theme in Leviticus 19:2 by shifting the analogy from transcendence to immanence, even so we are left with an analogy that is essentially metaphorical: God can use divine free will to interfere with nature, and we use our human free will to "interfere" in our own, personal natures.³⁷

Approach #3

A third response is that *k'dushab* is a property that a being can possess *intrinsically*—in the way it can possess, say, a specific height and weight. God possesses the property of holiness as part of the divine essence; human beings can acquire it by performing (or by refraining from performing) certain actions. We do not know what the property of *k'dushab* is like in the case of God—or even in our own case. The midrash says, "My [God's] *k'dushab* is higher than yours."³⁸ What we do know is only that through *mitzvot* we can attain a state that is sufficiently like God's *k'dushab* that it can be called *k'dushab*;³⁹ but exactly how our *k'dushab* compares and contrasts with God's, and indeed what God's (or our own!) *k'dushab* is, is beyond our ken. To be sure, some verses suggest that no comparison is possible between human and divine holiness, which might suggest there is no common property called *k'dushab*. This perspective about the incomparability of God is found, for example, in the following verses: "To whom can you liken Me, to whom can I be compared—says the Holy One" (Isaiah 40:25); "Who is like You, majestic in holiness" (Exodus 15:11); "None is holy like the Eternal" (1 Samuel 2:2). However, these verses can all be taken to express differences in degree—that is, differences in the levels of *k'dushab* attained by God and by human beings respectively.

The approach to holiness just described—that holiness is a quality intrinsic to a subject, one that we cannot perceive with our senses—has been called an “essentialist” or “ontological” approach.⁴⁰ Attacks on “essentialist” or “ontological” views of the Sabbath, sanctuary, Jewishness, the land of Israel, Jerusalem, Torah, *t’fillin*, and *m’zuzah* are common today,⁴¹ and some important sources, including statements by Maimonides as well as earlier rabbinic texts, support the rather different view that holiness refers to a certain set of relations.⁴² Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik writes:

Judaism has always maintained that holiness is not something objective inherent in an object, prevailing independently of the way this particular sacred object is treated. We denied the idea that there is sanctity per se, a metaphysical endowment which persists irrespective of man’s relationship to the object. Such an approach to the idea of the sacred would border on fetishism and primitive taboos. Sanctity is born out of man’s actions and experiences and is determined by the latter.⁴³

Although he is speaking of sacred objects as opposed to humans attaining *k’dushah*, the Rav’s discomfort with viewing holiness in terms of metaphysical qualities suggests that he would not view human beings attaining *k’dushah* in terms of “something inherent in the object.” Why is there opposition to the notion that *k’dushah* is an intrinsic property? Some of the critics are concerned about ethical and political repercussions of, say, viewing Jews as intrinsically different from non-Jews with regard to holiness (e.g., “Gentiles have lower-level souls than Jews”), and about the prospect that assigning intrinsic holiness to the land of Israel will produce extremism.⁴⁴ There is also a danger of creating cults centered on an “intrinsically holy” individual. For these reasons, perhaps it is best to say, with Menachem Kellner, that “holiness characterizes ‘God-liked behavior’”—and that’s all.⁴⁵

Because of the difficulties in treating holiness as an intrinsic property,⁴⁶ I submit that the best solution to the *imitatio Dei* problem as it affects a negative separation approach is to move in two stages.

First, we should concede that we have only a vague, near-metaphorical analogy between a transcendent God and human beings, who separate from the world and transcend it by observing commandments; and only a vague, near-metaphorical analogy between an immanent God who freely interferes with nature and human beings, who exercise free will to conquer their own natures. Second, we may underscore the analogy between God and humans with respect to engagement, as opposed to separation. With that in mind, let us turn now to the view that *k'dushab* requires engagement with the world, especially ethical engagement.

IV

Initially, it is tempting to associate the view that *k'dushab* requires engagement with the world with a “centrist” or “Modern Orthodox” orientation, while assigning the separation view to the Orthodox right. But in truth, a large step toward an engagement view is taken by Rabbi Moses Sofer (the Hatam Sofer), the very sage who famously declared, against the modern outlook, that “the new is biblically prohibited,”⁴⁷ and it is found as well in writings of his son, Rabbi Avraham (the Ketav Sofer) and other commentators.⁴⁸ A key element in the engagement approach (reminiscent of our earlier discussion) is that God is both transcendent and immanent. The Hatam Sofer, while not ignoring *p'rishab* in the sense of separation, infers from the rabbinic assertion that “this section was stated *b'hak'heil*” that *k'dushab* perforce must take place within the context of a society. Unlike those Gentiles who, he says, separate themselves from the world because they hate the world, Jews, he asserts, are *p'rushim* who are nonetheless involved with people—loving them and bringing them closer to Torah and the service of God.⁴⁹ The Ketav Sofer, in a similar spirit, maintains that to emulate the *elohim hayyim*, the living God, we must be engaged with life.

In fact, in a wide-ranging study of holiness, Eliezer Berkovits concludes: “Rather than indicating transcendence, it [holiness] seems

to be inseparable from the idea of immanence. Far from meaning inaccessibility, it reveals closeness and association. It is not the *mysterium tremendum* [the description applied by Rudolf Otto]. If anything, it is its very opposite.”⁵⁰ This identification of holiness with immanence connects with the views of both Malbim and the Hatam Sofer, though Berkovits has something else in mind about what holiness means (namely, closeness to God) and hence about how holiness and immanence are related. One need not go so far as Berkovits (and I think one should not), and deny altogether that *k’dushah* implicates transcendence. But immanence as an aspect of *k’dushah* cannot be denied. Accordingly, a person who is *kadosh* must be both removed from the world and, like God, involved in society with the aim of benefitting others. Whereas Malbim emphasized our conquest of our natures as the analogue to immanence, the views now under discussion tether the analogy with divine immanence to *mitzvot bein adam la-ḥaveiro*, laws governing interpersonal relations.

What about Roth’s point that the laws in Leviticus 19 are negative prohibitions, which suggests only separation from the world? One reply, reflected in the already-cited Ketav Sofer, is that in addition to the positive aspects of the commandments noted earlier, the negative prohibitions of Leviticus 19 are themselves predicated on Jews living a material life: participating in a family (verse 2); harvesting (verses 9–10); leaving fallen fruit of a vineyard for the poor and the stranger (verse 10); paying workers promptly (verse 13); conducting court proceedings (verse 15); interacting with others (verses 17–18, which include the famous command to “love your neighbor as yourself”); plowing, sowing, and making clothes (verse 19); owning slaves (verse 20); conducting business affairs (verses 35–36); along with other activities that I have omitted. Judaism, then, allows for earthly activities (even if we can’t conclude from the examples *per se* that the Torah encourages them)—but it places restraints on how these activities should be conducted.

The two most famous exponents of the “engagement” view of holiness are Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and Rabbi Joseph B.

Soloveitchik. In his commentary to Leviticus 19:2, Rabbi Hirsch refers to *k'dushah* as “self-mastery,” control over one’s appetites.⁵¹ But throughout his works he also champions engagement in ways too numerous to list. Let me adduce one telling passage from his commentary on the *haftarah* of *parashat Emor*, the Torah reading that sets out regulations governing the priests. In that *haftarah*, taken from Ezekiel 44, the prophet describes the activities of the Zadokite priests and the regulations that govern them. At one point we are told that, after leaving the special precincts of the Temple pursuant to performing the sacrificial service, when the priests move to the outer courtyard in which the populace is assembled they must remove their special clothing and change to other garments (Ezekiel 44:19). Why must they change clothes?⁵² Because, says Rabbi Hirsch, the true test of *k'dushah* is not what the priest does in the Temple, but what he does when he brings Judaism to the street, to the larger world.⁵³ This is not to assert that Rabbi Hirsch advocated “social action” and *tikkun olam* as they are conceived today. Rather, he seems to be saying that when Jews conduct themselves as they should, they present a model for the world. But his stress on social morality cannot be marginalized.

Perhaps the most robust articulation of the engagement view of holiness is found in the writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. In *Halakhic Man* and other writings, Rabbi Soloveitchik stresses that, in Judaism, holiness is not to be attained in a transcendent realm, but rather in this world: “An individual...[becomes holy] through actualizing the *halakhah* in the empirical world.”⁵⁴ The Rav offers this gloss on Leviticus 19:2: “Holiness consists of a life ordered and fixed in accordance with *halakhah* and finds its fulfillment in the observance of the laws regulating biological existence.” He is referring, no doubt, to both positive and negative commandments. Creativity is also, for Rabbi Soloveitchik, an aspect of *imitatio Dei* and holiness. The realization of *halakhah* makes the human being a creator of worlds (an activity that obviously constitutes *imitatio Dei*), and this is (part of) the meaning of *k'dushah*.⁵⁵ Moreover, he writes: “The intellect, the will, the feeling, the whole process of self-creation, all proceed in an ethical direction.”⁵⁶ In his essay “Majesty and Humility,” Rabbi

Soloveitchik states that “God purposely left one aspect of creation unfinished in order to involve man in a creative gesture and to give him the support to become co-creator and king.”⁵⁷

What I have presented thus far, however, is only one aspect of holiness in Rabbi Soloveitchik’s thought. At least in other works, he does not ignore separation. On the contrary, we find strong connections between *k’dushah* and “self-denial, self-despair, and self-sacrifice.”⁵⁸ In fact, he writes: “Sacrifice and holiness are synonymous concepts in Judaism.”⁵⁹ He subsumes self-denial and self-sacrifice (such in the laws of *niddah*) under *imitatio Dei* by invoking God’s act of *tzimtzum* (contraction) in kabbalistic thought.⁶⁰ This represents another way of dealing with our problem of understanding the analogy between human and divine holiness.⁶¹

Returning now, however, to the theme of engagement, one aspect of the imperative to engage with the larger world emerges in the following passage by the Rav:

Since we live among gentiles, we share in the universal historical experience. The universal problems faced by humanity are also faced by the Jew. Famine, disease, war, oppression, materialism, atheism, permissiveness, pollution of the environment—all these are problems which history has imposed not only on the general community but also on the covenantal community. We have no right to tell mankind that these problems are exclusively theirs....The Jew is a member of humanity.⁶²

These sentiments echo the Rav’s classic article “Confrontation.” In that essay he regards interfaith cooperation on social issues as imperative for Jews, even though, at the same time, he forcefully rejects calls for interfaith dialogue on theological issues. He writes: “Yes, we are determined to participate in every civic, scientific, and social enterprise. We feel obligated to enrich society with our creative talents and to be constructive and useful citizens.”⁶³ And

he writes: “We stand with civilized society shoulder to shoulder over against an order that defies us all.”⁶⁴ The Jews are both strangers and residents in their host societies—in Abraham’s phrase, *geir v’toshav anokhi immakhem*, “I am a stranger and a resident among you.” Every Jew has a dual identity: both a Jewish identity and a human identity.⁶⁶ We are strangers in our host societies; but we are obliged to participate in their affairs. The reason Jews did not historically follow this mandate, says the Rav, is that their host societies treated them in ways that made such cooperation impossible.⁶⁷ It is interesting that Rabbi Soloveitchik seldom invokes the notion that Jews are “a light unto the nations” (Isaiah 42:6, 49:6). Perhaps he wants to stress the equality of Jews with others in facing social problems, and not the Jews’ superiority. In any event, it is clear that he relates holiness to engagement in the world. Famously, he achieves this by viewing halakhic activity in this world as an act of “bringing down” transcendence. This is a far cry from requiring separation. More to our present purpose, though, he views creative action directed toward completing creation as expressive of *imitatio Dei*. Rabbi Menachem Genack, a close student of the Rav, frames the point this way:

[The Rabbis] insisted that we achieve holiness within the context of society, involved and engaged with the community.... Human holiness must be achieved not through negation, but through affirmation; not through isolation, but through engagement; not by abjuring the world and adopting a monastic life, but by the riskier approach of confronting the world and its imperfections. This approach chances failure, but it brings us to the path of redemption.⁶⁸

To repeat, however: for Rabbi Soloveitchik, separation (or more precisely, withdrawal) imitates God as well—by paralleling *tzimtzum*.⁶⁹

V

In sum, prominent modern rabbinic thinkers relate *k'dushah* to engagement with the world and to ethical conduct. Their approach creates a clear analogy between divine immanence and the human conduct prescribed by God. Just as God acts to benefit the world, so do we; just as God creates, we create, and we channel our creativity toward ethical goals. (Rabbi Soloveitchik would add that we channel creativity toward *talmud torah* as well.) It must be acknowledged, to be sure, that locating *k'dushah* specifically in the areas of creativity and interpersonal relations limits the analogy between human *k'dushah* and divine *k'dushah*, for it excludes seeing the observance of ritual laws as *imitatio Dei*. To subsume such observance under *imitatio Dei* requires either falling back on the loose analogy we explored in section III above, or invoking *tzimtzum*. So we have one clear form of *imitatio Dei*, and one looser one. Note that we can make our desired analogy (with respect to immanence) specific by referring to the larger biblical canvas—God's caring about the poor, widows, and orphans, and providing sustenance to all creatures—and, all the more so, by including actions listed in the Talmud such as visiting the sick, burying the dead, and clothing the naked.⁷⁰

But we confront an important question: can we truly connect the ethical imperatives just mentioned with the concept of holiness as it functions in biblical and midrashic texts?⁷¹ Or is the connection between *k'dushah* and ethics a modern invention ignored in earlier times?⁷² There are, I maintain, several premodern precedents that support the ethical dimension of holiness.

1. Earlier we mentioned the statement of Abba Shaul that *k'doshim tihyu* imposes upon us the obligation of *m'hakkeh la-melekh*, "imitating the king." To be sure, his statement does not expressly mention ethical traits or action as the proper mode of imitation. However, the same Abba Shaul elsewhere refers to imitation of ethical traits in particular. Specifically, on the words, *zeh eili v'anveihu* (Exodus 15:2), usually translated as "this is my God, and

I will glorify Him,” Abba Shaul comments: “[It means that] I will resemble God. Just as God is compassionate and gracious (*rahum v’hannun*), so too you should be compassionate and gracious.”⁷³ Thus, Abba Shaul’s statement about *m’hakkeh la-melekh* probably refers to the ethical traits of compassion and graciousness.⁷⁴

2. In the Mishneh Torah,⁷⁵ when prescribing the “middle path” as the correct path of conduct, Maimonides quotes the Sifrei on the verse “You shall walk in God’s ways” (Deuteronomy 28:9), which interprets those words as implying *imitatio Dei*. Maimonides’ citation of the Sifrei reads: “Just as God is called gracious, you should be gracious; just as God is called merciful, you should be merciful; just as God is called holy, you should be holy.”⁷⁶ The texts we have of the Sifrei do not mention holiness; it is Maimonides who adds “holy” to the traits “compassionate” and “gracious.” Maimonides thus connects ethical characteristics (graciousness and mercifulness) with holiness. It is a bit mysterious how he arrived at the version of the Sifrei that he presents, but the bottom line is that he connects *k’dushah* with ethical traits.⁷⁷
3. In his *Guide for the Perplexed*, Maimonides explains that Moses wished to emulate God’s attributes—that is, to govern the people by imitating the attributes by which God governs the cosmos. Maimonides states:

For the utmost virtue of man is to become like unto Him, may He be exalted, as far as he is able; which means that we should make our actions like unto His, as the sages made clear when interpreting the verse “Ye shall be holy.” They said: “He is gracious, so be you also gracious; He is merciful, so be you also merciful.”⁷⁸

The rabbinic statement that Maimonides cites is actually not a statement that the midrash makes with regard to Leviticus 19:2; rather, the statement is attached to Deuteronomy 28:9, “walking in God’s ways.” The effect of the mis-citation is to once again connect the idea of holiness to emulation of God’s ethical attributes.⁷⁹

4. Thus far I have cited rabbinic material. How firm is the biblical basis for connecting *k'dushah* and righteousness? To answer this question, let us return to the essay by Leon Roth cited earlier. Roth argues that when the Bible attributes holiness to God, it is in the context of affirming divine justice or righteousness (expressed at times by the words *tzedek* or *tz'dakah*). The most familiar of these associations is Isaiah 5:16, which is incorporated into the High Holy Day liturgy: "And the Lord of Hosts is exalted by *mishpat*, and the Holy God evinced as holy by *tz'dakah*." Roth cites a midrashic gloss on Leviticus 19:2 that begins: "Scripture elsewhere states..." and then quotes the familiar Isaiah 5:16 as the verse connected to *k'doshim tihyu*.⁸⁰ On this basis, Roth asserts a connection between divine holiness and divine *tz'dakah*.⁸¹ The translation of Roth's Hebrew article renders *tz'dakah* as "righteousness"; the JPS translation of Isaiah, however, renders *tz'dakah* as "retribution" (which carries an import similar to *mishpat*, the parallel word in the first part of the verse). That latter translation makes more sense in both the biblical context of the verse and also in the midrashic passage referring to God's acts toward the wicked. This connotation of *tz'dakah* may seem to pose an obstacle to Roth's linkage of *k'dushah* and righteousness. At the same time, Roth believes that God's imposing punishment on the wicked is an aspect of divine righteousness—thereby preserving the nexus between *k'dushah* and righteousness. Interestingly, the High Holy Day *mahzor* mutes the retribution theme when it places its citation of Isaiah 5:16 not immediately after the lines that describe the devastation of the wicked (in the section *u-v'khein tzaddikim*, "and the righteous will see and rejoice"), but instead in between an affirmation of God's eventual sovereignty and an affirmation of God's choice of and love for Israel and their sanctification through *mitzvot* (*v'kiddashtanu b'mitzvotekha*). The *mahzor*'s placement of the Isaiah verse at a distance from the theme of retribution may reflect a certain sensibility, one that does not restrict *tz'dakah* to retribution in connecting God's *k'dushah* and *tz'dakah*.

Roth invokes other verses to substantiate the connection between divine holiness and divine righteousness. Ezekiel 28:22 speaks of God executing judgment upon Tzidon, and then concludes “and I shall be sanctified in her” (*v'nikdashhti vah*); Ezekiel 38:22–23 expresses a similar sentiment. Isaiah suggests a connection between divine kindness and divine holiness: “The poorest among people shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel” (Isaiah 29:19).⁸² The designation “the Holy One of Israel” also appears when speaking of redemption.⁸³ Most significant for us is Isaiah 57:15–16: “the One who forever dwells and whose name is holy, [and declares:] I dwell on high in holiness, reviving the spirit of the lowly and contrite and withdrawing divine anger.” Further, “God in the *holy* habitation” is the champion of orphans and widows (Psalm 68:6).

Independently of Roth, Rabbi David Shapiro marshals evidence for the nexus between holiness, whether human or divine, and ethical behavior.⁸⁴ Indeed, his central thesis is that “*The attainment by reality in all its phases of the highest reaches of its moral faculties constitutes holiness.*”⁸⁵ Shapiro quotes Rudolf Otto’s 1917 classic, *The Idea of the Holy*, which speaks of a process in religion whereby “the numinous is throughout rationalized and moralized, i.e., charged with ethical import, until it becomes the ‘holy’ in the full sense of the word.”⁸⁶ Judaism reflects this ethical character of holiness. On the holy Sabbath, the Jew’s servants rest, so that “all sovereignty of man over man is abolished”; equality is affirmed and no life may be taken, even for judicial punishment.⁸⁷ The holy festivals “are celebrated by opening our doors to the needy and the stranger so that they may rejoice with us.”⁸⁸ The holy land of Israel does not tolerate evildoers; the holy Temple is in part a medium for ethical instruction; the jubilee year expresses equality and freedom from slavery.⁸⁹ God’s name is sanctified when Jews act ethically and it is desecrated when God is associated with injustice.⁹⁰

Rabbi Shapiro’s association of ethics with the Sabbath and festivals initially has the odd effect of making it seem that Judaism does not endorse values like equality and freedom on weekdays. But

in a private correspondence, Rabbi Yitzchak Blau has responded to this objection that differentiation in society and economic disparity may be inescapable: Shabbat reminds us, once a week, of another potential order. We value equality on weekdays but it is unattainable then—either for pragmatic reasons or because of a clash between equality and other values.

A critique of the identification of holiness with ethics is proffered by Isaac Heinemann in his discussion, already cited, of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's account of *mitzvot*. Heinemann states that "Hirsch confines the ideal of *k'dushah* within the four ells of ethics (*musar*)." (Heinemann notes affinities with Hermann Cohen's view that holiness is the ethical.) It strikes me that although Hirsch does speak that way at times, he is not really talking about ethics but rather about spiritual development, and there are many places where he portrays *k'dushah* as separation in the service of that goal.⁹²

Nonetheless, it can be objected that Leviticus 19 and parashat *Ki Teitzei* make no distinction between the ritual and the ethical, but rather blend all laws together—and not all ritual laws carry ethical import. So, if we want to link ethics and holiness, a bit more should be said about integrating these laws.

In this regard, let me make two suggestions. First, one way of linking ethics to the separation view of *k'dushah* (in the form of restraint from drives) is to argue that our conquest of drives ultimately leads us to ethical righteousness. Given that the "ritual" requirements of *k'dushah* in Leviticus 19 necessitate restraint of urges and desires and the curbing of egoism, such restraint and such mastery over egoistic drives can lead to strength of will in the case of *mitzvot bein adam la-haveiro*. Such a theory was advanced by Rabbi Eliezer Berkovits, and I have assessed it elsewhere.⁹³ Utilizing this approach, we may say that adhering to ritual is part of *k'dushah* because it promotes ethical conduct, but only the ethical aspect constitutes an imitation of God.

Second, might it be the case that Maimonides came to link holiness to *imitatio Dei* precisely for the reason we have been giving—namely, that *imitatio Dei* as regards k'dushah cannot be linked to all the *mitzvot*, but only to ethical ones? Perhaps for this reason Maimonides confines the theme of *imitatio Dei* to the moral realm: it cannot be applied to observance of all the commandments. Admittedly, this contradicts Maimonides' statements that k'dushah refers to doing all the *mitzvot*. Nonetheless, perhaps in his view the only *mitzvot* whose performance involves *imitatio Dei* are those that command the practice of graciousness, lovingkindness, etc. The others perhaps reflect *k'dushah*, but not *imitatio Dei*. I do not know whether this interpretation is correct, but it is I believe an interesting possibility.

Conclusion

In this paper I have pointed to two contrasting obligations that enable individuals and the Jewish nation to attain *k'dushah*. One is the obligation of *p'rishah* (separation), which the sages explicitly identify as *k'dushah*. Our initial problem was linking *k'dushah* thus defined to *imitatio Dei*, in accord with Leviticus 19:2 and other verses. If *k'dushah* amounts to performing the commandments—whether particular commandments or the entire corpus—how could God perform or not perform the commandments? I replied that in a loose way (and I have stressed just how loose it is), *p'rishah* mirrors and imitates God's transcendence. Malbim, however, sought to parallel *p'rishah* to immanence: control over one's natural urges parallels God's control over nature.

The other obligation implicated in *k'dushah* is engagement, which imitates God's immanence, insofar as God acts to better the world. The imperative "Be holy because I, the Eternal your God, am holy" is far easier to articulate when we focus on *imitatio Dei* as the imitation of immanence (divine action) than when we view it as the imitation of transcendence. The analogy between God's involvement in improving

the world and our efforts at achieving that goal are clear. It is much more difficult to find parallels between God's transcendence and humanity's transcendence—although some analogy, however loose, must be drawn in order to retain the *p'rishab* element. The upshot is that ethical conduct (and, for Rabbi Soloveitchik, creativity—which itself is ethically directed) is a primary element in achieving *k'dushab*, and perhaps even the main element. To further explicate the connection between *k'dushab* and holiness, I suggested as well that (1) ritual observance, on one theory, leads to ethical observance; and (2) although Maimonides held that *k'doshim tihyu* is shorthand for “do all of the *mitzvot*,” perhaps he confined the imitation of God that is linked to holiness to imitation of the “ethical” attributes of compassion and lovingkindness.

Ultimately, the dual movements of engagement and separation closely resemble the dialectic of Adam the first and Adam the second in Rabbi Soloveitchik's *The Lonely Man of Faith*,⁹⁴ and also in his essay “Majesty and Humility.”⁹⁵ Admittedly, one difference between Rabbi Soloveitchik's view and what I have suggested here is that the dual movement we are considering does not necessitate an oscillation between poles.

Contemporary Judaism contains, at one pole, groups and individuals who isolate themselves from the problems of the larger society, and at times even from moral challenges in Jewish society. At the other pole are those Jews for whom social action and *tikkun olam* are the be-all and end-all, Judaism's exclusive goal. Withdrawal is less an imitation of God's transcendence than social involvement is an imitation of God's immanence. If we think of *k'dushab* as requiring both imitation of transcendence and imitation of immanence, and do not neglect immanence but rather highlight it, then a theological framework for social duties becomes clear—and our further duty is to integrate both of these aspects of God, transcendence and immanence, in our quest for both wholeness and holiness.⁹⁶

NOTES

¹ In translating the Tetragrammaton as “the Eternal” rather than “the Lord,” I am deferring to the editor’s decision to use this translation throughout as explained by Rabbi Blech in his preface to this book.

² Sifra, *K’doshim*, on Leviticus 19:2; Vayikra Rabbah 24:5. See also Rashi to Leviticus 20:25–26, where he takes the *k’dushah*, holiness, of the Jewish people to connote their being *muvdalim*, separated.

³ Mekhilta D’Rabbi Yishmael, *Ba-hodesh*, Yitro 2.

⁴ B. Yevamot 20a.

⁵ Nothing in this essay hinges on whether “sanctify the mundane” truly has this positive implication, but it is, as I said, a natural inference to draw from the expression.

⁶ I will not here enter into the question of how the concepts of *tumah* and *tohorah* (purity and impurity) relate to *k’dushah*. But see Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* III 47, and the articles by Rabbi Moshe Lichtenstein in *Daf Kesher*, found at <http://etzion.org.il/dk/idx/archive.htm>.

⁷ See Rashbam to Genesis 37:2.

⁸ See Leon Roth, *Is There a Jewish Philosophy? Rethinking Fundamentals* (London: Littman Library, 1999), pp. 15–28 (translated from Hebrew by Raphael Loewe), at p. 17. See also Aḥad Haam, *Al Parashat D’rakhim* (Berlin, 1921), vol. 4, pp. 48–49. Roth was the first professor of philosophy at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

⁹ To wit: Leviticus 11:41–44, 20:25–26, 21:7–8; Deuteronomy 7:3–6, 14:1–2, 21; 23:15; Exodus 29:34; 30:32; 30:37.

¹⁰ Roth, p. 19.

¹¹ See Roth, pp. 17–20.

¹² See Vayikra Rabbah 24:5, and Sifra, *K’doshim* on Leviticus 19:2. For example, Leviticus 19:3 echoes the fourth and fifth commandments (about keeping Shabbat and honoring parents), and Leviticus 19:16 is linked to the sixth commandment (prohibiting murder). Leviticus 19 uses a plural, however, rather than the singular mode of address found in the Decalogue; see also Menachem Genack, “Kedoshim: You Shall Be Holy,” in Daniel Z. Feldman and Stuart Halpern, eds., *Mi-tohh Ha-ohel* (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2010), pp. 293–295, quoting Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

¹³ See Vayikra Rabbah 24: *she-rov gufei torah t’luyin bab*—most of the essentials of the Torah depend on (or are found in) these laws.

¹⁴ These two formulations (believing vs. knowing) reflect two approaches to translating, from the Arabic, the first commandment in Maimonides’ *Sefer Ha-mitzvot*.

¹⁵ Construing holiness as bound up exclusively with negative prohibitions is even more implausible when we look at the positive practices associated with

the Sabbatical and Jubilee years and the land of Israel. Admittedly we should be careful to distinguish holy objects, acts that sanctify objects or times, and being a holy people. For a discussion of a variety of complexities surrounding *k'dushab*, see the interview conducted with Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein by Rabbi Chaim Sabato in *Mevakshei Panekha: Conversations with Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein* (Tel-Aviv: Yediot Ahronot and Hemed, 2011), pp. 109–124.

¹⁶ Sifra, *K'doshim* on Leviticus 19:2. Some texts spell the word *m'hakkeh* (assumed in the translation above to be spelled with a *kof*, meaning “imitate”) with a *kaf*, meaning “await [the monarch].” But, problematically for this alterative reading, Abba Shaul invokes the theme of *imitatio Dei* elsewhere as well—as we will see later.

¹⁷ Sifra, *Sh'mini* 12:3 (on Leviticus 11:43) and 12:4 (on Leviticus 11:44); see also Sifra, *K'doshim* 10:21 (to Leviticus 20:26).

¹⁸ Roth recognizes the problem of interpreting the *imitatio Dei* motif and, as we shall see below, he adopts a drastic solution. Eliezer Berkovits argues against several interpretations of *k'dushab* and points to the *imitatio Dei* problem. See Berkovits' essay, “The Concept of Holiness,” in his *Essential Essays in Judaism*, ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: The Shalem Center, 2002), pp. 247–314; the *imitatio Dei* problem is mentioned on p. 314. The essay is reprinted from *Man and God: Studies in Biblical Theology* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1969), pp. 141–223.

¹⁹ Rashi's association of holiness with sexual restraint has rabbinic roots, however. See Vayikra Rabbah 24:6, B. Yevamot 20a, and Y. Yevamot 2:4 (but cf. Rashi to Deuteronomy 22:9). Warren Zev Harvey cites refraining from idolatry as the critical separation. See his article, “Holiness: A Command to *imitatio Dei*,” *Tradition* 16:3 (Spring 1977), pp. 16–17.

²⁰ B. Yevamot 20a, in the name of the talmudic sage Rava; cf. Rashi to B. Sanhedrin 53b, s.v. r. *y'hudah mahalif*.

²¹ See Nahmanides' commentary to Leviticus 19:2. When and how to do more than is required is explored by Rabbi Yitzchak Blau in his essay elsewhere in this volume.

²² See principle 4 of Maimonides' prologue. See also Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* III 33. See also Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *And From There You Shall Seek [U-vikkashtem Mi-sham]* (New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2008), p. 124: “There is one commandment that includes all 613, namely ‘You shall be holy’...” Maimonides also quotes the Mekhilta, *Mishpatim*, which states that whenever God creates a mitzvah, Israel's holiness is augmented.

²³ Sifra, *K'doshim* 10 on Leviticus 20:7; Sifrei Bemidbar 115, on Numbers 15:41.

²⁴ Harvey's formulation is in his essay cited above, pp. 18–19. Harvey points out that the liturgical formulations *kid'shanu b'mitzvotav* and *v'kiddashtanu b'mitzvotekha*, both meaning that God has “sanctified us with

the commandments,” fit well into the assertion that *k'dushab* encompasses all *mitzvot*.

²⁵ See Guide III 47; in Shlomo Pines' translation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), the relevant passages are on pp. 595 and p. 433. For more on Maimonides' view of holiness, see Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford: Littman Library, 2007), chapter 3, and the next section of this essay. I have used Kellner's translation of the *Sefer Hamitzvot* passage, p. 94 (which in turn adapts that of Charles B. Chavel).

²⁶ *Guide* III 8.

²⁷ In M.T. Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah 7:1; however, when Maimonides speaks of the prophet sanctifying himself, he makes reference to his separating himself from the common run of people, rising above them in achievement and perhaps even potential. This is *k'dushab*, separation, in a different sense.

²⁸ By contrast, the section of Maimonides' Mishneh Torah that he calls *Sefer Ha-k'dushab* deals with laws of sexual relations, laws of *kasbrut*, and laws of ritual slaughter. He says: "In these two respects [he seems here to include *kasbrut* and ritual slaughter as one], the Omnipresent sanctified us by separating us from the nations." See Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, pp. 94–95, nn. 27, 29.

²⁹ Harvey, pp. 8–9.

³⁰ Vayikra Rabbah 24:9.

³¹ God's otherness is accompanied by human consciousness of that otherness. See Sol Roth, *The Jewish Idea of Community* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1977), ch. VI, especially pp. 95–98.

³² Roth, pp. 22–23. Roth draws an analogy to a passage in B. Sukkah 30a on another topic.

³³ See Malbim to Genesis 1:26 and 28. He states there that, of all created things (including angels), only human beings have free will, and this grants human beings dominion over "a small world."

³⁴ See also Berkovits, "The Concept of Holiness."

³⁵ Vayikra Rabbah 24:9.

³⁶ This view will be discussed further below.

³⁷ As we shall see below, Berkovits—independently of Malbim—maintains that *k'dushab* refers to God's immanence. But in putting forth this thesis, he does not emphasize its utility in solving the *imitatio Dei* problem.

³⁸ Vayikra Rabbah 24:9.

³⁹ Again, God would possess the attribute by the essence of divine nature; we would attain it through our efforts.

⁴⁰ See Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, ch. 3. See also Sol Roth, *The Jewish Idea of Community*, pp. 103–107.

⁴¹ The concepts just cited are the ones that Kellner discusses.

⁴² For more on this idea, see Nathaniel Helfgot's essay elsewhere in this volume. Cf. also the interview with Rabbi Lichtenstein in *Mevakshei Panekha* (note 15 above).

⁴³ Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*, eds. David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Reuven Ziegler (New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2000), p. 64. See also his *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, ed. Michael S. Berger (New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2000), p. 150: "Objective *k'dushab* smacks of fetishism." At times Rabbi Soloveitchik refers to *k'dushab* as a "transcendental quality" (e.g., *Family Redeemed*, p. 74) but I will not venture here to explain such locutions.

⁴⁴ Rabbi Soloveitchik criticizes the view of Yehudah Halevi and Moses Nahmanides that the land of Israel possesses "an objective metaphysical quality" called holiness (p. 150); instead, he maintains that human actions create the land's holiness. See also the texts of Maimonides discussed by Kellner (*Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism*, pp. 107–115), which accord with Rabbi Soloveitchik's view.

⁴⁵ The *Daat Mikra* commentary on Leviticus 19:2 (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1991) struggles to explain what it means for God to be *kadosh*, apparently taking *kadosh* as a property, and possibly troubled by how *imitatio Dei* can be achieved vis-à-vis holiness. *Daat Mikra* argues that there are no equivalents in human language to the notion of "divine holiness" that exhaust its meaning, and that "the holiness that flesh and blood individuals are made to reach is but a feeble imitation of God's *k'dushab*, which cannot be fathomed" (p. 56).

⁴⁶ Sometimes people explicate transcendence in terms of our inability to know what God is like. But it is not clear that transcendence, so construed, could really be a property of *God*. Does it not refer to a property of *us*—namely, our inability to conceive of what God really is?

⁴⁷ A pun on the law of *hadash*. The Hatam Sofer's position is considerably more complex than the stereotype of him; see Aaron Schreiber, "The Hatam Sofer's Nuanced Attitude Towards Secular Learning, *Maskilim*, and Reformers," *Torah u-Madda Journal* 11 (2002–2003), pp. 123–175.

⁴⁸ I am indebted here to the references and explications in Yehudah Nahshoni, *Hagut B'farashiyyot Ha-torah* (Bnei Brak: Yehudah Nahshoni, 1981), vol. 2, pp. 488–492.

⁴⁹ Hatam Sofer presents this amidst other possibilities, one of which he expresses with reluctance. The Hebrew word *p'rushim* (singular, *parush*) literally means "those who are apart" and was the Hebrew name of the sect generally referred to in English as the Pharisees.

⁵⁰ Berkovits, "The Concept of Holiness," p. 314.

⁵¹ *The Hirsch Chumash*, trans. Daniel Haberman (Jerusalem and New York: Feldheim and Judaica Press, 2009).

⁵² We can see the force of this question when we realize that, in contrast to the kohen, the Pope never appears in public in anything but papal garments.

⁵³ This motif is found also in Rabbi Soloveitchik's writings, especially *Halakhic Man*, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), pp. 94–95.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 46–47. Objects, likewise, are sanctified by human actions: “Holiness is created by man, flesh and blood.”

⁵⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 99–137, esp. pp. 100–101. On *imitation Dei* in Rabbi Soloveitchik's thought, see the two essays by Walter Wurzbarger in his *Covenantal Imperatives*, eds. Eliezer L. Jacobs and Shalom Carmy (Jerusalem, 2008), pp. 161–190.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵⁷ “Majesty and Humility,” *Tradition* 17:2 (Spring 1978), p. 34.

⁵⁸ *Family Redeemed*, p. 75.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 35. One must be careful here, because not all thinkers will embrace kabbalistic concepts, and because even in Rabbi Soloveitchik's own thought it is not clear how literally he uses kabbalistic concepts. Lawrence J. Kaplan argues that he uses them for literary effect; see Kaplan's “*Motivim Kabbaliyyim B'baguto shel Ha-Rav Soloveitchik: Mashma'utiyyim o Itturiyyim?*” in *Emunah Bi-z'manim Mishtanim* (Jerusalem: Mercaz Yaakov Herzog, 1996), pp. 75–95.

⁶¹ Rabbi Soloveitchik asserts, too, that *k'dushah* requires “the ability to answer the violent, orgiastic, hypnotic call of nature in the negative” (*Family Redeemed*, p. 110). In that last context he is speaking of consecrating objects.

⁶² Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Abraham's Journey: Reflections on the Life of the Founding Patriarch* (New York: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2008), p. 203.

⁶³ “Confrontation,” *Tradition* 6:2 (Spring/Summer 1964), pp. 27–28.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁶⁵ Genesis 23:4, in speaking to the Hittites to negotiate a gravesite for Sarah. See “A Stranger and A Resident,” in *Reflections of the Rav* lectures of the Rav adapted by Rabbi Abraham R. Besdin (Jerusalem: The Jewish Agency/Alpha Press, 1979), pp. 169–177. This lecture strongly resembles “Confrontation.”

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

⁶⁷ “Confrontation,” p. 20. Regarding the apparent novelty of the contemporary Orthodox emphasis on *tikkun olam*, see Jacob J. Schacter, “*Tikkun Olam: Defining the Jewish Obligation*,” in Raphael Madoff, ed., *Rav Chesed: Essays in Honor of Rabbi Dr. Haskel Lookstein* (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2009), vol. 2, pp. 183–204.

⁶⁸ Genack, “Kedoshim: You Shall Be Holy,” p. 295. I am taking Rabbi Genack's eloquent words somewhat out of context. In context, he is drawing a distinction between God's holiness and human holiness while retaining the *imitatio Dei* motif: “God, however, is entirely independent of the universe. His holiness is manifest in His separation, loneliness, and isolation. God is holy in that He is totally ‘Other,’ beyond the universe, hidden by clouds of transcendence,

shrouded in infinity. The Rabbis in the Midrash feared that man might try to emulate God and attempt to achieve holiness in the same fashion—by being insulated and aloof, cloistered from the world’s temptations, potential cruelty, and vulgarity. [And that is why they said that God’s holiness and the human being’s holiness are different.]” In my presentation, I stress that God is not insulated.

⁶⁹ See again the cautionary note in n. 60.

⁷⁰ See B. Sotah 14a.

⁷¹ Certainly *imitatio Dei* is expressed in ethical acts—clothing the naked, visiting the sick, comforting mourners, burying the dead (B. Sotah 14a)—but I am looking for links between *holiness* and ethical imperatives.

⁷² See Isaac Heinemann’s classic *Ta’amei Ha-mitzvot B’sifrut Yisrael* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1956), vol. 2, pp. 150–151. Heinemann doesn’t really say that the view is unprecedented, but rather that prior to Hirsch, it was not held by philosophers.

⁷³ Mekhilta D’Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, *Shirata*, 3.

⁷⁴ Because this connection is likely, the reading of *m’hakkeh* with a kof is probably the correct one.

⁷⁵ *Hilkhot Dei*:ot 1:5–6.

⁷⁶ On the textual problems with *Maimonides’ quotations*, see Kellner, *Maimonides’ Confrontation with Mysticism*, pp. 99–102, and his citations from Michael Schwartz’s Hebrew translation of the Guide (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2002).

⁷⁷ Kellner tentatively suggests that by including holiness with graciousness and mercifulness, Maimonides was emphasizing the “non-ontological character of holiness” (p. 101). I have raised the additional but not exclusionary possibility that he wanted to connect holiness with ethics. I wonder whether Maimonides’ mis-citation is an instance of a tendency on Maimonides’ part to occasional faulty memory when he cited texts. See Marc Shapiro, *Studies in Maimonides and His Interpreters* (Scranton, PA and London: University of Scranton Press, 2008), pp. 11–55.

⁷⁸ *Guide* I 54, Pines translation, p. 128.

⁷⁹ My discussion assumes that Maimonides is speaking of the emulation of these attributes in ordinary ethical life. Some interpreters believe he is referring to the attributes that are exercised by political leaders. Discussion of that interpretive possibility is beyond the scope of this essay.

⁸⁰ *Vayikra* Rabbah, *K’doshim* 24:1. Roth notes (p. 25) that Plato expresses the same thought about *imitatio Dei* in his dialogue *Theaetetus*. We must escape to the realm of the gods “with all possible speed, and such escape constitutes being like God as best we may: to become like [Him] means to become righteous and holy” (Roth’s translation).

⁸¹ Cf. Sol Roth, *The Jewish Idea of Community*, ch. VI, which cautions against reducing the holy to the ethical.

⁸² Other quotations in Roth, some more effective than others, include Isaiah 30:12–18 and Amos 4:1–2.

⁸³ See references on Roth, p. 24.

⁸⁴ David Shapiro, “The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism,” *Tradition* 7:1 (Winter 1964–1965), pp. 46–80.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 51 (italics in the original).

⁸⁶ Otto, *The Idea of The Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), p. 75. Berkovits, “The Concept of Holiness,” pp. 312–314, rejects Otto’s concept that holiness represents the *mysterium tremendum*.

⁸⁷ Shapiro, p. 63. I omit from my footnotes the biblical and rabbinic texts that Shapiro cites in defense of his assertions.

⁸⁸ Shapiro, p. 76.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68, 69.

⁹¹ Heinemann, vol. 2, pp. 148–154. Harvey notes that God is hallowed through both righteousness (Isaiah 5:15) and sacrifices (Leviticus 22:32).

⁹² For further discussion of Hirsch on sanctification, see Yitzchak Blau, “R. Hirsch on Sinfulness, Physicality, and the Sacrificial Order,” at <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/modern/07modern.htm>.

⁹³ See my essay, “Berkovits and the Priority of the Ethical,” *Shofar* 31:4 (Summer 2013), pp. 85–102, and also “The Seeming Disconnect Between Ritual Observance and Moral Behavior,” in *Rav Shalom Banayikh: Essays Presented to Rabbi Shalom Carmy*, eds. Hayyim Angel and Yitzchak Blau (Jersey City, NJ: KTAV, 2012), pp. 283–299. Harvey writes, however: “While the imperative of ‘walk in His ways’ is moral, the *imitatio Dei* of the command to be holy is *religious*.”

⁹⁴ This work originally appeared in *Tradition* (Summer 1965), and has been republished many time (most recently, by Koren Publishers, 2011).

⁹⁵ See n. 56 above.

⁹⁶ I thank Rabbi Yitzchak Blau for his comments on an earlier version of this essay, and Aaron Segal for helpful communication on the topic.