

## ***K'dushat Makom: On Sacred Space*<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

One of the most iconic pictures in recent Jewish memory shows three Israeli paratroopers immediately after the liberation of the Western Wall on the third day of the Six Day War in 1967. They are shown expressing awe and wonder as they stand before the last remnant of our holy Temple and the touchstone of our history in the land of Israel. In those moments, and in many subsequent months and years, both religious and avowedly non-religious soldiers—and, indeed, multitudes of religious and non-religious Jews in Israel and throughout the world—have felt something special, something unique, something historic, something...spiritual. Indeed, in many published comments in subsequent months, non-religious Israelis expressed feelings of deep emotion and sanctity as they came into direct contact with a historic remnant of the holy Temple in Jerusalem. And this continues until today in the comments one reads on Facebook, in blogs, and in newspaper articles of young Jewish adults who have been given the gift of a Birthright trip by leading Jewish philanthropists and the State of Israel, upon their visit to the Kotel. As one young woman recently put it:

“One thing that really hit me hard was the Kotel,” she says. McCombs expected to have “the normal tourist reaction, like, ‘Oh, there’s the Wall, that is so cool.’” Instead, she found herself in tears. To share the experience “with other people

I'd never known before, seeing how hard hit they were too" added to this uniquely spiritual moment, says McCombs.<sup>2</sup>

This essay is a short examination of the concept of sacred space in Jewish thought and its meaning for us today as we struggle to experience a sense of the sacred and numinous in our fast-paced and ever-changing world and the secular ethos that finds no room for the holy.

### **In the Beginning: Heschel on the Priority of Time**

In his highly influential monograph *The Sabbath*, the noted theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel lays out a fundamental dichotomy between holiness of place and holiness of time in Jewish thought. In Heschel's words:

Judaism is a *religion of time* aiming at the sanctification of time.... The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals, and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn.... Now what was the first holy object in the history of the world? Was it a mountain? Was it an altar? It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *kadosh* is used for the first time...it is applied to time: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness... When history began, there was only one holiness in the world, holiness of time. When at Sinai, the word of God was about to be voiced, a call for holiness in man was proclaimed: "You shall be unto me a holy people." It was only after the people had succumbed to the temptation of worshipping a thing, a golden calf, that the erection of the Tabernacle, of holiness in space, was commanded. The sanctity of time came first, the sanctity of man second, and the sanctity of space last.<sup>3</sup>

In Heschel's reading, this is not only a historical reality but one that bespeaks an ongoing statement of our hierarchy of values, such that sanctity of time always supersedes sanctity of space.<sup>4</sup> And even when we speak of holiness of space in Judaism, Heschel writes that no place on earth, is holy by itself....The temple became a sacred place...yet the paradox of a sanctity in space was yet sensed by the prophets. The pious people of Israel would sing, "Let us go into His dwelling place; let us worship at His footstool" (Psalm 132:7); but the prophet proclaimed: "Thus saith the Lord: The Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool; where is the house that you may build unto Me?" (Isaiah 66:1). If God is everywhere, He cannot be just somewhere."<sup>5</sup>

Heschel continues in this vein for many paragraphs, painting a picture of a Judaism in which the concept of the sanctity of space is downplayed and relegated to a secondary role in the larger drama of humanity's interaction with the Divine.

### **Critique of Heschel**

This sharp antinomy between holiness of time and holiness of space is one of the enduring legacies of Heschel's thought. It has been cited in writing hundreds of times in the half-century since he introduced it to the English-speaking world in 1951. And these ideas have penetrated not only the inner circles of Heschel's natural constituencies in the more liberal movements in American Judaism; they have also had an impact on Orthodox circles and thinking. To take just two examples: First, the great educator and Bible scholar Nechama Leibowitz approvingly cites a number of passages from Heschel's writing cited above, in her discussion of the relationship between the building of the tabernacle and the laws of Shabbat at the beginning of the Torah portion *Va-yak'heil*.<sup>6</sup> Second, my good friend and teacher, Dr. David Shatz, has noted to me that he vividly

recalls a teacher at Yeshiva University High School in the early 1960s assigning his class to read *The Sabbath*, so as to explore the underlying concepts of Shabbat.

As with many of Heschel's antinomies, the reader must grapple with a nagging question. Heschel's extreme formulation of the dichotomy is, like all his writing, elegant, poetic, and edifying. But is it correct?

While it is true that the first element that God describes as "holy" is indeed time (Genesis 2:3), the biblical narrative proceeds to spend many verses describing the special place on earth, the Garden of Eden, where God places Adam and Eve to live their idyllic life.<sup>7</sup> And, most tellingly for our purposes, this place is described as the spatial domain in which God is intensely present, the place through which God literally "walks" during the course of the day; it is also called the place "which is before the Eternal."<sup>8</sup> This term is later used by the Bible to describe the land of Israel as a whole<sup>10</sup> and more specifically the precincts of the Temple—or, in Maimonides' reading, the entire environs of Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the entire corpus of the Bible is saturated with the notion of the holiness of space—whether in narratives such as Jacob's awakening in Beth-El (Genesis 28), Moses' encounter with God at the burning bush where God directly tells him that he is standing on *admat kodesh*, terra sancta (Exodus 3:5), or in the detailed laws of the tabernacle contained in so many parts of the five books of the Torah (especially Exodus 25–40). The Temple, the *mikdash*, is of course a central institution in the biblical worldview—and its name is connected to the same Hebrew root as *kodesh*, holy.<sup>12</sup>

As we noted above, Heschel claims that the *mishkan*, the tabernacle, was only introduced to the Jewish people as a concession, reflecting God's lowered expectations of them in the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf. This reading does find support in some *midrashim* and is understood by many to be the view of medieval commentaries

such as Rashi,<sup>13</sup> and it is explicit in the writings of Rav Ovadiah Sforno;<sup>14</sup> however, the plain sense of the text and many other voices in the tradition (such as Nahmanides) see the tabernacle as a fully desirable phenomenon, as part of the divine plan all along and in no way a concession. Furthermore, leaving this debate, the Torah clearly envisions a central role for the holy sanctuary in the land of Israel long before there is any hint of backsliding or sin around a human creation. In the Song of the Sea, at the beautiful closing section of the poem, Moses prophetically declares: *mikdash Adonai kon'nu yadekha*, “the holy place that You, Eternal, have established” (Exodus 15:17). Two *parshiyot* later, at the conclusion of the Book of the Covenant in Mishpatim, the Torah introduces the concept of the three pilgrimage holidays and concludes with the following phrase: “The first fruits of your land should be brought to the House of the Eternal, your God (*beit Adonai Elohekha*)” (Exodus 23:19). And into this reality, the Bible continually drives home the notion that humanity, and specifically the Jewish people, can “defile” the sanctuary and thus drive out God’s presence through ritual impurity and, by extension, by their infidelity to the dictates of the covenant through their moral, ethical, and ritual behavior.

If we move beyond the biblical text itself, the picture regarding sacred space that emerges is even clearer. The foundational text of rabbinic Judaism is, of course, the Mishnah. The order Mo'ed, the section devoted to the Sabbath and the holy days of the Jewish calendar, takes up one-sixth of its corpus. In contrast, the orders of Zera'im, Kodashim, and Tohorot, which focus on laws rooted in the holiness of the land of Israel and the mitzvot that are applicable exclusively in that locale—the laws of the Temple, sacrifices, and ritual purity,<sup>15</sup> as well as laws that focus on holiness of place, objects, and human beings and the avoidance of sacrilege of those entities—take up a more than half of the text of the entire Mishnah. And it is not simply a question of relative space accorded to each of these themes. The entire text of the Mishnah, even outside of those orders, is permeated with the concepts of the holiness of the land of Israel and its consequences, as well as the holiness of the Temple and its

attendant concerns, especially the sacrificial rite and the laws of ritual purity. These areas of concern make their mark in other areas of the Mishnah, far removed from the tractates that deal directly these issues. To cite one example: consider the *mishnayot* included in tractate *Eiduyot*, which contains a veritable cross-section of various *halakhot* cited by various sages on one specific day. Roughly two-thirds of the *mishnayot* recorded there focus on areas of ritual purity, laws tied to the land of Israel, and laws of sacrifices—all of which go hand in hand with the idea of sacred space. The next-largest category of halakhic material is laws related to marriage and personal status, with only occasional forays into matters dealing with torts and or with the holidays and Shabbat.

In short, a perusal of the biblical and rabbinic material yields the undeniable conclusion that Heschel's paradigm is extreme in its formulation and does not accord with the evidence of the foundational texts of Judaism. It is no doubt true that with the destruction of the Temple and the exile from the land, the centrality of the laws relating to the land, to the Temple and sacrifices, and to ritual purity waned—both in the practical sphere and in the theoretical consciousness of both the scholarly elite and the average Jew. Indeed, with these of areas of *halakhab* relegated to *hilkh'ta dim'sbiha* (that is, laws that would only be operative in some far-off and distant messianic utopian age), the other areas of Jewish law took on greater centrality in Jewish consciousness. Laws relating to rituals for home and synagogue, personal status, and business now received the lion's share of the attention of sages and laypeople alike, and the “temples of time” that were Shabbat and the holidays took on even greater significance. Moreover, as many scholars have noted, it was during the period of the aftermath of the destruction of the Temple that the great enterprise of aggadic ethicization and reinterpretation of the laws of sacrifices and ritual purity took place, in order to give to these laws meaning and resonance in a world where they could not be practiced. It is during this period that great works such as *Vayikra Rabbah* were written, which reinterpreted and reinvigorated the “dead letter” laws of ritual purity, sacrifices, and agricultural matters

with new meaning and religious purpose in a world that had lost the living, breathing reality of the entire diverse and rich reality that had existed in the time of the Temple.

Moreover, one has to raise the question of whether Heschel's extreme formulation is a by-product of his hasidic upbringing. In many of its core texts, Hasidism engages in a spiritualization of the concrete reality of the land of Israel, and shifts that to the "temple of the heart" or to the court of the rebbe. Gershom Scholem, the pioneering scholar of Kabbalah and Hasidism, put it this way in an early essay on this topic:

The terms [Egypt, Zion, Eretz Yisrael, Galut (exile) and *ge'ullah* (redemption)] were turned into allegorical catchwords denoting no longer only what they actually mean, but standing for a personal state of mind, for a moral condition, or, as we would say in contemporary jargon, for existential situations of man. Notions like these have lost their concrete historical or geographical meaning, they have no longer to do with the fate and future of the nation, but with the individual's struggle for his own salvation. If Egypt, the house of bondage, is a sphere that exists in every man, it is only logical that the same applies to the land of Israel and to the inner redemption.<sup>16</sup>

But to retroject that paradigm shift back onto the central texts of the tradition does violence to the historical truth and to the reality of the original and primary message presented to us as the word of God in those texts.<sup>17</sup>

### **And Yet, Profound Insight**

With all of the justified critique of Heschel's sharp dichotomy between holiness of space and holiness of time, it is important to note that he did highlight an important idea that warrants reiteration.

Holiness of space in the Jewish tradition is not something detached from the God of Israel. Paralleling the extensive work done by noted biblical scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann, Heschel is correct to point to the distinction between the nature of sanctity of space that we find in the Bible and that which appears in many other ancient Near Eastern and pagan cultures. The land of Israel, or the Temple, or any synagogue, is not holy because of any independent primordial power that resides in it, in some sort of magical sense. Space is imbued with sanctity by God: it is God's presence and God's desire to fill a space with sanctity that gives it special status. There are no forces independent of or co-equal to the Divine that inhere in any space that can be a source of holiness or that can act as foci of holiness in the absence of God's will. This is expressed clearly in the book of Ezekiel and in many rabbinic comments on the exile of the Divine Presence (the Shekhinah).<sup>18</sup> One of the central messages of these texts is that God removes the Divine Presence from the Temple when humans, both individually and collectively (as part of *k'neset yisrael*, the Jewish people) fail to live up to the covenant. The Temple does not have an independent status, disconnected from God's choice to infuse the locale with holiness. And thus, when God chooses to remove the Divine Presence from the Temple, symbolically expressed by the image of divine chariot coming down to escort the Divine Presence out of the Temple, it then becomes open and vulnerable to destruction and plunder. At that point it is simply a structure of wood and gold and silver, and it can neither withstand the assault of the enemy nor can it protect itself.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel often run up against the mistaken ideology of the masses, who believe that Jerusalem and the Temple can never be overrun because of some inherent holiness that will protect them from any harm. In the eyes of these groups, the Temple has some form of inherent power that will ward off all evil and any threat. As David Henshke has written:

This idea that holiness of space is rooted in God's conscious choice to manifest His glory and presence is a deeply rooted theme throughout the Bible. The Bible speaks of the tent

of meeting, where God “comes down” to interact with and communicate His will to Moses and the Jewish people. The Temple is the place which God chooses to “have His name dwell” and the “house” that He establishes for human beings to come and bring sacrifices and pray and encounter the presence of the Divine.<sup>20</sup>

This theme finds continued expression in the rabbinic language used to describe the synagogue as well. The *aggadot* in the first chapter of tractate Berakhot, for example, consistently uses phrases such as “when God comes to the synagogue”—once again highlighting the notion that there is no inherent primordial sanctity that inheres in these structures and locales. Rather, the core of the holiness of these sacred spaces is solely a function of God’s rendezvous, as it were, with human beings in this special venue, which is set aside for prayer and study.

It is, of course, true that there are halakhic aspects of the holiness of the Temple area that remain in place even after the destruction of the Temple. In a famous passage in the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides notes that the sanctity of Jerusalem, with its attendant ramifications for the laws pertaining to sacrifices, ritual purity, and other aspects of *halakhah*, continues even today, although the status of the rest of the land of Israel is dependent on other factors. Here too, however, it is striking to note that Maimonides’ formulation once again highlights the point that we have articulated:

Why do I say that the original consecration sanctified the Temple and Jerusalem for eternity, while in regard to the consecration of the remainder of Eretz Yisrael, in the context of the Sabbatical Year, tithes, and other similar [agricultural] laws, [the original consecration] did not sanctify it for eternity? Because the sanctity of the Temple and Jerusalem stems from the Shekhinah, and the Shekhinah can never be nullified. Therefore, [the Torah] states: “I will lay waste to your sanctuaries” (Leviticus 26:31). The sages declared:

“Even though they have been devastated, their sanctity remains.”<sup>21</sup>

The Temple environs, and more broadly Jerusalem itself, are eternally sacred because their sanctity is rooted in God’s ongoing presence in those locales. It does not rest on any inherent sanctity of the places, or on any sort of sanctity that is disconnected from the will of God investing that space with ongoing holiness by means of God’s presence.

### **The Theological Conception of the Holy Place**

From a multitude of biblical and rabbinic sources, one indeed gets a strong sense of what Louis Jacobs termed an “objective” notion of the presence of God in the holy places deemed sacred by Jewish tradition and law.<sup>22</sup> In the language of the Bible and in many rabbinic texts, God personally—or the Divine Presence, or God’s glory—is said to “dwell” in these spaces. There is a palpable sense of a real concrete presence of the Divine that animates these places. This notion is most fully identified with thinkers in the Middle Ages such as Yehudah Halevi<sup>23</sup> and Nahmanides,<sup>24</sup> and in more contemporary times with the thought of Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Kook.<sup>25</sup>

In some *midrashim*, the process by which God “shoehorns” the Divine Presence into this sacred space is called *tzimtzum*, an act of contraction, in which the Divine Presence permeates the area of the sacred. In later kabbalistic literature, this very term will be used to explain the theological conundrum of a finite world emerging from an infinite God who seems to leave no room for any other matter to exist. And indeed there were, and no doubt continue to be, many Jews who adhere to an essentialist notion of the holy as having some inherent manifestation of the Almighty.

This perspective, of course, was—and continues to be—challenged by those who identify with a more rationalist understanding of

Judaism. The questions posed include: What does it mean for God's presence to dwell in a place? How should we understand the concept of a "holy place" in a Jewish monotheistic worldview that rejects the corporeality of God? Echoing these concerns is the rhetorical question that King Solomon expressed at the dedication of the Temple: "But will God, in truth, dwell on the earth? Behold the heavens and the heaven of heaven cannot contain You: how much less so this house that I have built!" (1 Kings 8:27). Medieval Jewish philosophers sharpened this formulation; Saadiah Gaon, for example, expressed this idea as follows:

*A propos* of place, I say that it is inconceivable for several reasons that He should occupy any place whatsoever. First of all, He is Himself the Creator of all space. Also He originally existed alone, when there was no such thing as place....Furthermore space is only required by a material object which occupies the place of the object that it meets and comes into contact with....This is, however, out of the question as far as the Creator is concerned. As for the assertion of the prophets that God dwells in the heavens, that was merely a way of indicating God's greatness and His elevation, since heaven is for us the highest thing we know of. The same applies to statements that God dwells in the Temple....The purpose of all of this was to confer honor upon the place and upon the people in question. Besides that, it is to be remembered that God had also revealed in that place His specially created light, of which we have spoken previously, that was called *shekhinah* and *kavod*.<sup>26</sup>

And thus, in this more subjectivist interpretation of the notion of holiness of space, the reason that Judaism chooses to maintain that notion of sacred place is to teach us the proper approach that we should have to God and to ensure that we have the proper respect and behavior in our approach to the sacred rituals associated with serving God in those places.

A second approach within this more rationalistic camp is found in the commentary of Don Isaac Abravanel to the biblical narrative of the building of the tabernacle in the wilderness:

The divine intention behind the construction of the Temple was to combat the idea that God had forsaken the earth and that the divine throne was in heaven, remote from humankind...It is all a parable and allegory representing the immanence of God's presence and providence.<sup>27</sup>

In this reading, once again the subjective note comes to the fore. The sanctity of these spaces and the notion of God dwelling in them are simply code words for the ongoing notion of God's providential care (*hashgahah*) of humanity—and of the Jewish people in particular. It reflects a philosophical dogma about God's involvement with the world without violating the canons of the pure monotheism that is at the heart of the rationalist conception of God.

In a similar vein, Professor Menachem Kellner has argued at length that Maimonides did not believe in any concept of inherent holiness in objects, persons, or time. In his words:

According to this view holiness is a status, not a quality of existence. It is a challenge, not a given; normative, not descriptive. It is institutional (in the sense of being part of a system of laws) and hence contingent. This sort of holiness does not reflect objective reality; it helps constitute social reality. Holy places, persons, times, and objects are indubitably holy, and must be treated with all due respect, but they are, in and of themselves, like all other places, persons, times, and objects. What is different about them is the way in which the Torah commands that they be treated.<sup>28</sup>

Another theme that is sometimes highlighted in these discussions is the notion that holiness is derivative of the great number of *mitzvot*

that are associated with a specific locale or person. Thus, many who take an anti-essentialist view of holiness often point to the following *mishnah*:

There are ten levels of holiness. The land of Israel is the holiest of all lands....And what makes it holy? They bring from it the omer [barley offering], the first fruits, and loaves of bread [the elevation offering of the first grains on Shavuot]—things that are not brought from other lands (M. Keilim 1:6).

Moving from medieval times to the modern era, the sharpest expression of this notion is found in a celebrated passage written by Rabbi Meir Simḥah of Dvinsk, a noted talmudic scholar of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, in his Bible commentary entitled *Meshekh Hokhmah*. In addressing the question of why Moses broke the tablets of the law upon seeing the Israelites sinning with the golden calf, rather than simply returning the tablets to God, he posits a calculated educational purpose in Moses' behavior. Moses was trying to convey to the people this profound religious message:

I am not holy. I am a man just as you. The Torah is not dependent upon me. Even had I not returned, the Torah would have continued in my absence. The sanctuary and its utensils are not intrinsically holy. Their sanctity derives from God's presence in our midst. If you sin, these objects lose their holiness. Even these tablets of testimony—the word of God—are not holy, in and of themselves. Their sanctity derives from your relationship with God and your willingness to observe God's law. Now that you have sinned, these tablets are mere stone, devoid of any sanctity. As proof of my point, I shatter them before you!<sup>29</sup>

And in our contemporary age this idea was often highlighted by Dr. Yeshayahu Leibowitz and his sister, Professor Nechama

Leibowitz, in their respective writings. Moreover, this notion also found great expression in the writings of the leading light of modern Orthodox thought, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who wrote:

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. The very instant man adopts a coarse attitude toward the hallowed object—the moment of sacredness is eliminated. Sanctity expresses itself not in the formal quality of the object or institution but in a relationship between the latter and man. It is an experience rather than an endowment...<sup>30</sup>

And so, in addressing this fundamental tension, we are left with conflicting positions in the sources and voices within our tradition, regarding how we are to understand the concept of sacred space in Jewish thought. Do we push forward with a full-throated conception of an objective reality of God's presence in some form that animates those areas and locales? Or do we scale back these ideas and, guided by a rationalist sensibility, translate them into terms that relate more to human feelings and practice? Whatever philosophic conclusion we come to, it is undeniable that in the realm of praxis and halakhic expression, the idea of sanctity of place—of things—remains a central concept in the corpus of Jewish law and Jewish thought. Moreover, it animates our vision of the eschaton, which the committed Jew thrice daily expresses at the conclusion of the Amidah prayer:

May it be Your will, Eternal One, our God and God of our ancestors, that the Temple be rebuilt speedily in our days... and there we shall serve You with reverence, as in the days of old and as in former years.

### A Final Note

One of the unique aspects of the notion of the holiness of place in Jewish law is the role played by the human being in achieving the status of sanctification of the locale. For example, although the land of Israel was endowed by God with sanctity at the time of the patriarchs (if not earlier), there remain large dimensions of holiness, with great halakhic ramifications, that are dependent on human acts of sanctification. For the land of Israel to be fully endowed with sanctity, the Jewish people—through various ritual and symbolic acts—need to imbue the land with its full potential of halakhic *k'dushab*. The Jewish people play a central role in enhancing and expanding the inherent sanctity that exists in the land, and it is they who formally establish its parameters. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik expressed this notion very directly in one of his printed halakhic discourses:

We say [in the liturgy]: “God who sanctifies Israel and the holidays,” [which is interpreted by the Talmud to mean:] “who sanctifies the people of Israel, who [then] sanctify the holidays—i.e., the people establish the holidays [through the calendar]. So too in the land of Israel and the Temple, the act of sanctification is accomplished by the Jewish people. Entire tracts of *halakhab* exist relating to the sanctification of the city of Jerusalem and various sections of the Temple environs; how and through what objects we sanctify these spaces...the holiness of the human being is rooted in the holiness of the Torah [which has sanctified the individual]... for the Torah is an object that imbues sanctity in other things.<sup>31</sup>

He further expressed this notion in a number of his philosophical discourses, as in the following passage:

Holiness, *k'dushab*, sanctification is a venturesome undertaking. It is not given a grant but is created by man.

The creative gesture which engenders holiness draws on inner resources contained in the realm of man's naturalness; the holiness of the personality, even though it comes into full bloom in one's spiritual dimension, in his noble, sublime emotions, profound thoughts, great volitions and strivings, is deeply rooted in the physical layers of his existence, in his carnal drives, in his being integrated into the kingdom of nature... Judaism considers the body the wellspring of *k'dushab*. That is why it focused its attention on the body.<sup>32</sup>

These notions were recently reiterated in a published interview with my revered teacher, Rabbi Soloveitchik's preeminent disciple and son-in-law, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, who eloquently expresses these core concepts:

When I was a young man, one summer I heard a lecture from the Rav [Rabbi Soloveitchik] z"l on the topic of the sanctity of place, *k'dushat makom*. However the lecture did not only deal with that topic.

Holiness, the Rav stated at the time, is created by the human being. The blessed Holy One created a neutral world. In that world there is raw material that one can imbue with sanctity. Of course, it is true, the Rav noted that there are things that have sanctity in and of themselves. However, holiness, fundamentally, is created by the human being. The human being receives neutral raw material and gives it a personal imprint, rooted in one's personality and one's personal sanctity, and thus the process begins to snowball. Afterwards I saw something similar to his words in a comment of the *Meshekh Hokhmah* to the verse, "When the call of the *shofar* concludes they may go up on the mountain" (Exodus 19:13). For through the acts of God, nothing is made holy, only when human beings sanctify something... I have presented here a number of examples of the principle that one can add another layer of holiness, through the additional input of the human being, even when we are discussing sanctity that is

rooted in the divine sphere, which comes from the blessed Holy One.

Question: From whence does this power of the human being derive, to create holiness or to add a dimension of sanctity?

Answer: Clearly, the foundation is to understand that holiness emanates from the blessed Holy One...The verse states: “You shall be holy, for I, the Eternal your God, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2)...I interpret this to mean that there is a heavenly sanctity. God is the apex of holiness, the source of *k'dushah*, and thus the human being who connects to the blessed Holy One, who imbibes that sanctity and sanctifies oneself at that level—that person can also create holiness in other things.<sup>33</sup>

The human being and God become partners in expanding and enhancing the parameters of the holy in the concrete world. As the human being became a partner with God at the time of creation in enhancing and improving the physical world, so too do the individual and the collective play a crucial role in imbuing that created reality with sanctity and spirituality.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> “Young Adults Thrilled and Inspired by JFSA Birthright Trip,” *Arizona Jewish Post* (August 9, 2012), online at <http://azjewishpost.com/2012/young-adults-thrilled-and-inspired-by-jfsa-birthright-trip>.

<sup>3</sup> Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), pp. 8–10.

<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between sacred time and sacred space in religion in general, see the classic work by Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1957).

<sup>5</sup> *The Sabbath*, p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> Nechama Leibowitz, *Studies in Shemot, Exodus* (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1978), vol. 2, pp. 654ff.

<sup>7</sup> It is true that the term *kadosh* does not appear in Genesis 2 in describing the Garden of Eden; but, as indicated in the next few lines of text and the next footnote, the Bible does intimate that this is a special place where God is manifest.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Genesis 3:8 and 4:16.

<sup>9</sup> See the opening to the book of Jonah.

<sup>10</sup> Many writers have noted the parallels between the narrative of the Garden of Eden and that of the holy spaces of the tabernacle and the Temple in later biblical narratives. (For one example, see Amnon Bazak’s online essay, “A Return to Eden,” at <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha72/19-72teruma.htm>.) It is interesting to note that in Ezekiel 28, the prophet describes the former glory of the king of Tyre by first noting that the king saw himself as living in an idyllic situation, “in Eden, the Garden of God” (verse 13), and then moving on to a second image of the king who fancied himself as being in the “holy mountain of God” (verse 14). The juxtaposition of “Eden” and the “holy mountain of God” in this passage is telling, once again intimating that there is something special about the physical locale of Eden.

<sup>11</sup> Cf., e.g. Rambam’s comment at M.T. Hilkhot Ma’aseir Sheini V’neta Reva’i 2:1.

<sup>12</sup> The exact meaning of the root *kof-dalet-shin* in the Bible is in dispute. It clearly has various nuances in different contexts. We use it in this essay in the most common sense of the term, “holy.”

<sup>13</sup> For a contrary view that rejects this interpretation of Rashi and the midrashim he builds upon, see the online essay by Yair Kahn, “Build for Me a Sanctuary,” at <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/parsha71/19-71teruma.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> See, for example, his commentary to Exodus 31:28.

<sup>15</sup> The exact relationship between the concept of *k'dushab* (holiness) and that of *toborah* (purity) requires its own analysis, which is beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it is to say that the two concepts often go hand in hand in the Bible, with the requirement to maintain ritual purity as an indication of the holy status of the place or person under discussion.

<sup>16</sup> Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (1971; rpt. New York: Schocken, 1995), p. 200.

<sup>17</sup> In a parallel phenomenon from a wholly other historical and cultural context, scholars have noted that part of certain early Christian replacement and supersessionist theologies tended to downplay the reality of Jewish holy places. Earthly Jerusalem relating to a specific people and covenant was replaced by a spiritual Jerusalem that was to embrace all of humanity. This was of a piece with the move to replace carnal Israel—Israel of the flesh—with Israel of the spirit.

<sup>18</sup> Ezekiel 8 and 10, and cf. the midrashic material at Eikhah Rabbah 1:32 and 1:33.

<sup>19</sup> This is forcefully hinted at in the famous midrashic comment that the Jewish people take comfort in the fact that God poured out divine wrath on “wood and stone” but not on the people of Israel (Eikhah Rabbah 3:14). The Hebrew is *shafakh hamato al ha-eitzim v'al ha-avanim*.

<sup>20</sup> This passage is taken from David Henshke's important essay, “Mishkan Ha-eidut U-veit Ha-b'hirah,” first published in *Megadim* 11 (1990). The essay discusses the exact distinction between the nature of the holiness of the tabernacle and tent of meeting, on the one hand, and that of the Temple in Jerusalem, on the other.

<sup>21</sup> M.T. Hilkhot Beit Ha-b'hirah 6:17.

<sup>22</sup> Louis Jacobs, “Holy Places” in *Judaism and Theology* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2005), pp. 51–65.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, *Kuzari* II 14–22.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, his commentary to Leviticus 18:25.

<sup>25</sup> See for example, *Orot Eretz Yisrael, Ha-milhamah* (Bet El [Israel]: Sifriyat Havaah, 2007), or idem, *Orot* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1973), ch. 1.

<sup>26</sup> *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions* II 11, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (1948; rpt. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 124–125. For more on the notion of the Shekhinah as God's special light, see Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, trans. Shlomo Pines (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974) I 64, pp. 156–157.

<sup>27</sup> Abravanel to Exodus 25:2.

<sup>28</sup> Menachem Kellner, *Maimonides' Confrontation with Mysticism* (Oxford and Portland, OR: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2006), p. 88.

<sup>29</sup> Commentary to Exodus 32:17. See further the discussion in Marvin Fox, “The Holiness of the Holy Land” in Jonathan Sacks, ed., *Tradition and Transition: Essays Presented to Chief Rabbi Sir Immanuel Jakobovits* (London: Jews' College, 1986).

<sup>30</sup> *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships* (New York: KTAV, 2000), p. 64.

<sup>31</sup> *Sbiurim L'zeikber Abba Mari* (Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1984), pp. 175–176.

<sup>32</sup> *Family Redeemed*, p. 74.

<sup>33</sup> *M'vakshei Panekha: Sihot Im Ha-rav Aharon Lichtenstein*, ed. Hayyim Sabbato (Tel Aviv: Yediot Ahronot, 2011), pp. 116–124, *passim*. In part of the passage omitted here, Rav Lichtenstein outlines a number of examples of the notion that in areas of *halakha* that appear to reflect sanctity that emanates exclusively from above—e.g., the sanctity of Shabbat, for the human being adds a dimension of *k'dushah* through one's personal actions and words to the existing level of holiness.