

Sabbath & Sanctuary

To say that holiness is complex is an understatement. At its root in the Hebrew word *kadosh* lies the idea of separation – a strict sense of order, of borders and boundaries that somehow enforce the possibility of meaning. Absent those boundaries and bonds and all is chaos – *tohu v'vohu*. Defining these boundaries and borders may be said to be the word of Torah expressed in the myriad of detail reflecting the reach of the process of making such distinctions into every nook and cranny of our experience.

But two institutions in particular emerge in the book of Leviticus and in *parshat kedoshim* in particular as being central: *Shabbat* and in *mikdash* – the Sabbath and the Sanctuary – the manifestations of holiness in time and in space. These two central institutions are breathed in one breath in Chapter 19, verse 30:
“You shall keep my Sabbaths and venerate my sanctuary, I am the Lord.”

We ask: Why *shabtotai*? Why is the Sabbath referred to in the plural? Our commentators explain that this is a hint regarding the two aspects of the Sabbath as reflected in the two different formulations on the two renditions of the Ten Commandments: *zachor et hashabbat* “Remember the Sabbath” and *shamor et hashabbat*, “Observe the Sabbath.” *Zachor et hashabbat* we are told, refers to the aspect of *shabbat* that has to do with the creation of the world. *Shamor et hashabbat* we are told, refers to the aspect of *shabbat* that has to do with the exodus from Egypt. *Shabbat* is both “a remembrance of the work of creation” and a remembrance of the exodus from Egypt, the work of salvation.

It is said: “For six days God created the heavens and the earth,” implying for six days only. Came *Shabbat* and provided the stability to prevent a return to chaos at the end of six days and the strength to re-create the heavens and earth for another six days – *Shabbat*, we might say, is the mechanism God left in the world to reiterate creation at the end of every six day cycle. The world is born and dies in six days and out of the Sabbath it is reborn. Such is the meaning of the *shabbat* in relation to the work of creation.

But *shabbat* is also a reminder of the exodus from Egypt – it is, we might say, the placeholder of redemption. And the six days of the week then are *galut* – exile. Each week we inhabit *galut* and each *shabbat* we are offered *geulah*, redemption. Redemption gives way to exile the way creation gives way to entropy. The Sabbath permits the renewal of the world that will quickly run down toward chaos again and its redemptive power expels us once again into exile.

Our teachers teach that this is true for each of us, individually, existentially. It is taught:

All who observe the Sabbath according to *halacha* even if they worshipped idols like the generations of (Hebrew), they are forgiven – and the rabbis objected. How can one be forgiven on this most grievous of sins! It is because the Sabbath turns the Jew into a new person completely.

And yet that person will sin again just as the six days of creation will again wind down towards chaos and just as every taste of redemption will precipitate a new exile.

The power to transform ourselves, to make ourselves anew, is given to us. It is implicit in the constant renewal of the natural world. The need to be vigilant to the need to transform ourselves again, to repeat the process as the very content of our lives is equally implicit in the inevitability of exile despite the sweetness of redemption.

Thus there are two aspects attached to the sanctuary as well.

“Make for me a sanctuary that I may dwell among you” AND “Three times a year you shall see the face of the Lord your God.”

Which is it? Does God dwell among us or do we visit three times a year?

As redemption gives way to exile and renewal devolves into chaos, so too is God always among us and yet we must direct ourselves to visit – we become unconscious of the Presence – separated from it. Instead of *kadosh – hol*, instead of holy, profane. The borders between the two are in space and time and we cross those borders inevitably as a consequence of a living and breathing world. We can renew ourselves because we will need to; we can taste redemption because exile is inevitable; we can make the pilgrimage to God because we will become unconscious to God’s Presence. We are afflicted because there is a remedy. That is the basis for hope and for trust.

The world does not look perfect – that is because it is the world – but it will not end – that is because there is *shabbat*, because there is redemption, there is a Presence dwelling amongst us.

That is the basis for our hope. In a world that does not look perfect we have the faith that it’s perfection is yet a possibility. We have a Sabbath to experience both the faith that nature will continue to sustain us and that God’s Presence may be approached through worship. And this faith sustains us.