# EDUCATION AND THE SACRED:

Judaic holiness and the dynamics of teaching and learning:

— An Ethnographic Study from Jerusalem —

Isaac Wade Calvert
Brasenose College
University of Oxford

*A thesis submitted for the degree of*
*Doctor of Philosophy*
Hilary 2018

## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature and dynamics of the relationship between Judaic holiness and Jewish teaching and learning practices. One way of examining this relationship is by focusing on sacred content. The contribution of this thesis is to go beyond sacred content to also focus on teaching as a sacred act—in other words, approaching teaching *as* sacred, rather than teaching *the* sacred. Findings build upon and reinforce existing literature on Judaic holiness, but make an original contribution by placing these perspectives in a specifically educative context.

I investigated this relationship from an ethnographic perspective, attending three Orthodox Jewish learning communities (*yeshivot*) in Jerusalem over a period of six months. Acting as participant observer, I attended classes, studied with students, collected artifacts, took daily field notes and conducted in-depth qualitative interviews. As I analyzed fieldwork data together with relevant academic literature and sacred Jewish texts, a number of key themes emerged. These themes are described in three findings chapters. They outline methodological, experiential, teleological, relational, environmental, structural and theological dimensions of the sacred in Jewish educative practice. From the perspective of study participants, teaching and learning are not only related to the sacred, but themselves constitute a sacred act.

While academic literature tends to focus on the human elements of sanctity, and confessional religious literatures on its theistic dimensions, this thesis illustrates a dynamic way of dovetailing these two approaches. Considered from the Judaic perspectives of study participants, the sanctity of teaching and learning is seen to be both contingent upon human, volitional action as well as a connection to God. Such actualized sanctification is believed to affect and even qualitatively alter the nature of educative methods, environments, encounters and, ultimately, the ontology and capacity of both teachers and learners. This has implications for educative practice more broadly conceived, including insights on the role of a teacher in the student-teacher relationship, an alternative perspective on learning outcomes, a remembrance-oriented epistemology, a teleological connection between teaching and learning and the value of struggle in the learning process.

# EDUCATION AND THE SACRED:

Judaic holiness and the dynamics of teaching and learning:

— An Ethnographic Study from Jerusalem —

Isaac Wade Calvert
Department of Education
Brasenose College
University of Oxford

A thesis submitted for the degree of
*Doctor of Philosophy*
Hilary 2018

*—Dominus illuminatio mea—*

# ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the nature and dynamics of the relationship between Judaic holiness and Jewish teaching and learning practices. One way of examining this relationship is by focusing on sacred content. The contribution of this thesis is to go beyond sacred content to also focus on teaching as a sacred act—in other words, approaching teaching *as* sacred, rather than teaching *the* sacred. Findings build upon and reinforce existing literature on Judaic holiness, but make an original contribution by placing these perspectives in a specifically educative context.

I investigated this relationship from an ethnographic perspective, attending three Orthodox Jewish learning communities (*yeshivot*) in Jerusalem over a period of six months. Acting as participant observer, I attended classes, studied with students, collected artifacts, took daily field notes and conducted in-depth qualitative interviews. As I analyzed fieldwork data together with relevant academic literature and sacred Jewish texts, a number of key themes emerged. These themes are described in three findings chapters. They outline methodological, experiential, teleological, relational, environmental, structural and theological dimensions of the sacred in Jewish educative practice. From the perspective of study participants, teaching and learning are not only related to the sacred, but themselves constitute a sacred act.

While academic literature tends to focus on the human elements of sanctity, and confessional religious literatures on its theistic dimensions, this thesis illustrates a dynamic way of dovetailing these two approaches. Considered from the Judaic perspectives of study participants, the sanctity of teaching and learning is seen to be both contingent upon human, volitional action as well as a connection to God. Such actualized sanctification is believed to affect and even qualitatively alter the nature of educative methods, environments, encounters and, ultimately, the ontology and capacity of both teachers and learners. This has implications for educative practice more broadly conceived, including insights on the role of a teacher in the student-teacher relationship, an alternative perspective on learning outcomes, a remembrance-oriented epistemology, a teleological connection between teaching and learning and the value of struggle in the learning process.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ..... i
Abstract ..... ii
Table of Contents ..... iii
Prologue ..... vii
Chapter One: Introduction ..... 1
    The Question ..... 1
    The Broader Discussion ..... 1
    An Invitation ..... 2
    Thesis Outline ..... 3
Chapter Two: Education and the Sacred ..... 5
    Importance of Conceputalizing the Sacred ..... 6
    Value of Conceptualizing the Sacred ..... 6
    The Sacred: An Etymology ..... 7
        “Sacred”: An Etymological Overview ..... 8
        Judaic Holiness (*kedusha* – קדושה): An Etymological Overview ..... 9
    Academic Conceptualizations of the Sacred ..... 11
        The Core of the Sacred ..... 11
        The Behavioral Sacred ..... 13
        The Polarized Sacred ..... 14
        The Experiential Sacred ..... 14
        The Contextualized Sacred ..... 15
        Summary ..... 16
    *Kedusha*: Judaic Holiness ..... 17
        The Importance of Holiness in Judaism ..... 17
        God: The Core and Source of Judaic Holiness ..... 18
        Holiness as Connection to God ..... 19
        Holiness as Knowing God ..... 21
        Holiness as Invitation to Act ..... 22
        Reciprocal Sanctity ..... 23
        Holiness as Actualized Potentiality ..... 24
        Holiness as Imitatio Dei ..... 26
        Holiness as Eternal Purpose ..... 27
        Summary ..... 28
    Teaching, Learning and the Sacred ..... 28
    Teaching, Learning and Judaic Holiness ..... 29
    Summary ..... 30
Chapter Three: Method ..... 32
    Text ..... 33
    Interviews ..... 35
    Participant Observation ..... 38
    Data Collection and Analysis ..... 39
    Storytelling ..... 40
Chapter Four: *Farbrengen* ..... 42
    *‘Farbrengen’* Narrative ..... 42
    *Merkaz David:* The *Yeshiva* ..... 53
    Themes ..... 54
        Practice and Divine Proximity ..... 55
        Spatial and Temporal Sanctity ..... 57

Storytelling and Inheritance ........ 60
Singing and Sacred Physicality ........ 63
*Khavrusa* and the Rabbi-Disciple Relationship ........ 65
Worthiness and Dispositional Consecration ........ 70
Summary ........ 73
Chapter Five: A Walk in Holiness ........ 75
'A Walk in Holiness' Narrative ........ 75
*Or Akiva*: The *Yeshiva* ........ 91
Themes ........ 91
Living Remembrance ........ 92
Consecratory Purpose and Eternity ........ 96
Sanctification by Functionality ........ 101
Sanctity through Orality ........ 108
Purposive Difficulty ........ 111
*Imitatio Dei* and Perceptual Theosimilitude ........ 113
Summary ........ 117
Chapter Six: Among Holy Men ........ 118
'Among Holy Men' Narrative ........ 118
*Osher Shlomo*: The *Yeshiva* ........ 144
Themes ........ 145
Holiness as Extra-Propositional Experience ........ 145
Personified Sanctity ........ 147
*Chinuch* (חינוך): Awakening the Dormant Inherent ........ 150
Holiness as Teaching and Learning ........ 154
Teaching, Learning and Reciprocal Sanctity ........ 157
Divine Pedagogic Influence ........ 161
Summary ........ 166
Chapter Seven: Conclusion ........ 167
Teaching and Learning as a Sacred Act: A Judaic Perspective ........ 170
Sacred Methods ........ 171
Sacred Environment ........ 171
Sacred Encounter ........ 172
Sacred Understanding ........ 173
Sacred Educative Capacity ........ 173
Sacred Ontology ........ 174
Implications ........ 175
An Alternative Approach to Outcomes-Based Learning ........ 175
Living Remembrance: A Practical Epistemology ........ 175
Awakening to an Awareness of the Dormant Inherent ........ 176
A Purposive Connection between Teaching and Learning ........ 177
Purposive Difficulty ........ 177
Limitations ........ 178
Directions for Future Research ........ 178
Summary ........ 178
Epilogue ........ 180
Bibliography ........ 183

*Wer nicht von dreitausend Jahren,*
*Sich Weiss Rechenschaft zu geben*
*Bleib im Dunkeln unerfahren*
*Mag von Tag zu Tage leben*

*Those who cannot draw conclusions*
*From three thousand years of learning*
*Stay naïve in dark confusions*
*Day to day live undiscerning*

*-J.W. von Goethe*[1]

[1] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "West-östlicher Divan, Rendsch Nameh: Buch des Unmuts" in *Poems of the West and the East*, trans. John Whaley (Bern and New York, 1998), 189.

# PROLOGUE

Long ago, in a lonely *shtetl* of Eastern Europe, there lived a small, unruly boy named Mordechai. Most days, while the other boys in the village were inside, busily learning to read and study Torah in the footsteps of their fathers, little Mordechai was as far away from school as one could be, roaming the woods and fields to his heart's content. But the boy's parents were heartbroken. How could their son, their only son, be the end of a chain of generations that went back, father to son, teacher to student, to Moses, he who first learned Torah from God Himself at Sinai. They tried everything to help their son, but he simply had no interest in learning. Fearing for their boy, they spoke to family, friends, neighbors, even the village rabbi; but the best advice did nothing, and the worst only made Mordechai resist his schooling all the more.

Then, just as they were about to give up hope, Mordechai's parents heard the news. A holy man, none other than Rabbi Aharon the Great of Karlin, would be passing through their little town where, remote though it was, his reputation of piety and righteousness preceded him. Rumors of the miracles he had wrought in villages just like their own began to fly about the town, filling the townspeople with hope and anticipation. But none were more deeply moved than Mordechai's mother and father. "If anyone could help our son," they thought, "it was him."

On the day the great rabbi arrived, nearly everyone in the village lined up outside the synagogue, desperately hoping for the chance to meet him and receive the blessing of Heaven at his hand. But so eager were the townspeople for their miracle that Mordechai and his parents, who had been waiting longer than most, soon found themselves pushed to the back of a line that it seemed might never end. They began to worry. Perhaps too much time had passed. Would the Rav be too tired to see them? Their anxiety grew with each passing moment.

Then, after waiting for what seemed an eternity, made all the longer by their flighty son whose boyish heart still longed for trees to climb and space to run, they appeared at the synagogue's humble doorway. Passing the threshold, they beheld the Rav for the first time. Old and bent, he looked burdened by the wisdom he carried. And though the wrinkles of his careworn face seemed deeply etched by the passage of time, a timeless light shone in his bright, discerning eyes, and all at once the fear of being too late dissolved from their hearts as they stepped further inside, closing the door behind them.

Standing behind Mordechai, their hands resting lightly on his little shoulders, they explained their problem to the Rav. He listened intently to them, inclining an ear in their direction, his eyes tightly closed in deepest concentration. "So," he growled when the parents had finished, opening his eyes and staring straight at Mordechai whose fidgety longing to be elsewhere had yet to leave him. "He won't learn Torah?!" he roared again in a voice that, had it come from another, younger man, might have been frightening, but from one so frail and feeble, seemed almost otherworldly.

Suddenly, the great Rav turned his piercing gaze on the boy's parents. "Leave us," he said. "I will teach him to study Torah myself." Mordechai's mother and father looked at each other doubtfully with a gaze that spoke volumes in a language only they understood. "We've waited so long to help our son," it seemed to say, "but is this what we wanted—to leave him with so powerful a holy man as this? Will he be alright?" But with a determination owed more to their fathers than to their son, they kissed his forehead, gave his shoulder an affectionate squeeze, and left the room.

Shakily, the almost ancient rabbi got to his feet and took a few steps forward. Then, looking to Mordechai over gold-rimmed spectacles perched on the tip of his nose, he spoke in a voice as warm and kind as his previous outburst had been harsh and jarring. "Come here,

my boy," he said, smiling as he dropped his cane and raised his arms to embrace him. As he took one then another tentative step toward the boy, the old man's feeble frame shook with the effort. And so, more to prevent his fall than accept his embrace, the apprehensive boy grabbed one of his outstretched hands. Then, with one last step, the aged Rav wrapped the boy in his brittle arms, still shaking with the effort it cost them, and held him close. Though bent with age, he was just tall enough that the boy's head rested squarely on his chest as they embraced.

After only a moment, the boy let go, timidly tapping the rabbi's back to tell him he should do the same. But the old man held on and, and though the boy's arms now hung defeated by his side, the old man seemed neither to mind nor to notice. After several minutes had passed in silence, the listless boy at last stopped squirming. As he stood there, finally relaxing in the midst of this grandfatherly embrace, a peace unlike any he had felt in his young and frivolous life rested upon him. Pressing his ear to the old man's heart, he closed his eyes and listened, as he noticed the rabbi's heartbeat for the first time. Both clock and calendar melted away as time and eternity became a singular present, and for once, Mordechai was still as he raised his arms and returned the Rav's embrace, still propping him up in the frailty of his age.

Then, suddenly, the Rav let him go, smiled, and led him out to his parents, who still waited anxiously for him just outside. How long it had been, he could not tell, but judging by the worried looks on the faces that greeted him, it had been longer than he thought. "You can take your son!" the old man shouted, returning to the same gruff manner he had used with them at the first. "Did it work?" they asked as boldly as they dared. Raising his eyebrows, he struck the ground with his cane. "Did it work?" he cried. "You'll have to wait and see." Then turning inside, he closed the door, and was gone.

As they began their journey home, Mordechai's parents looked back and forth from their boy to each other. "Was there a difference?" they wondered, "Had he changed?" But they had to put their thoughts aside as they stopped at the village market before heading home. With every person they met—the butcher, the grocer, the baker—Mordechai asked his parents, "Who is she?" "Why did he seem so unhappy?" or "Where did he come from?" And, as the days and weeks passed, Mordechai became more interested in people than ever before, speaking with them, listening to them and becoming more attuned to their feelings. One day, he listened as a group of Torah scholars in the village spoke with one another, speaking of more people and stories than he had ever thought it possible for one person to know. When he asked them where they had heard so many stories of so many people, they told him the last thing he had expected to hear: these were the stories of Torah.

Rushing home to his parents, he begged them for more stories like the ones he had heard in the village. Shaking off their disbelief, they began telling him story after story for as long as he would listen, his newfound love for people and their stories carrying over to scripture more and more each day. Before long Mordechai soon asked for more stories than they knew, and, to their joy, he made his way to the village school and began to learn, that he might more easily read for himself the stories he had come to love.

But it wasn't easy. Torah was all toil, the Sages said, and while he had been climbing trees and running free, the other boys in the village had been studying hard, toiling in Torah as their fathers before them. But plunging headfirst into that toil, he learned to read after a month. After a year, he was the best student in the village and the light of Torah's fire began to burn bright within him, visible in the light of a countenance that grew brighter with each passing day of study. His knowledge of Torah grew so great, in fact, that whenever disputes broke out between neighbors in the village, they called upon him to resolve them. So well did he perform the duties of a rabbi that, when he came of age, he became a rabbi himself, and loved both learning and the people he served all the rest of his days.

Years later, when he had become what many thought the greatest scholar of his generation, his students would often ask him, “Rabbi, how did you come to know so much? What gave you such great insights into Torah?” In those moments, he would close his eyes in concentration, recalling to his mind and heart the moment he had met holiness in another. “All I ever learned,” he would say, “I learned from Rav Aharon when, when I stopped long enough to listen, I heard the beating of his aged heart.”[1]

---

It was nearly ten at night as I sat in the foyer of the Steinsaltz Building, waiting for a private audience with Rav Steinsaltz himself. As I waited, I looked at the pictures of famous rabbis shaking hands with the same wizened figure who must have been the Rav. In that moment, I couldn’t help but wonder how I, of all people, had come to interview someone as revered as this. Weeks earlier, as I was leaving Michael Pomeranz’ secondhand bookshop only a few blocks away, the owner waved a frantic hand excitedly in my face, beckoning me to wait until he had finished his phone call. A few minutes later, he asked me if I had ever seen if Rav Steinsaltz could answer my question.

Of course, Rabbis and their booksellers often referred to authors, even those of antiquity, as though they were present, and Steinsaltz was a name I had seen before. “I haven’t read anything of his,” I replied, thinking that Michael must have some book of his in mind to sell me. “No,” he said, his head popping up from behind a wobbly stack of dusty tomes, “I mean, why don’t you go ask him? His office is right over there.” He wasn’t some ancient author, but a living rabbi, and not only was he alive—he lived just around the corner. “Let me give you his information,” said Michael. Then, as I grabbed the sticky note on which he had hastily scrawled a phone number, he leaned in and said, “He’s harmless, but he’ll test you.” Then, returning to his work, he bustled off to the storage room, and was gone.

And now I was finally there, sitting in the waiting room to see a man whose fame preceded him, who even had a building named after him. His secretary walked in and, asking me to follow him, led me into an office where sat a wizened octogenarian behind a desk only slightly less disheveled than the whiskers of his copious beard. Between sips of tea, coffee and cognac (a glass of each sat before him between volumes of ancient scripture) and puffs of an old pipe he cradled in one hand, he began. “You’re an American?” he asked, his raspy whisper of a voice pronouncing each word slowly and deliberately in a thick accent I didn’t recognize. I nodded. “And from Oxford?” he continued. I nodded again. “Hmpf,” he snorted, puffing his pipe with a smile. “That means...that means that you are both *very serious*,” he retorted, finishing his puff and jabbing the end of his pipe in my direction, “and *very boring.*” I might have been offended had it not been for a kindly chuckle that reached my ears from the jovial smirk that had spread across his face. Respectfully, I waited for some time, but when he said nothing, and waited in return, I ventured a question. “Rabbi,” I asked, “are teaching and learning holy?”

He put down his pipe and sipped his tea, contemplating my question. “Among all the commandments,” he said after a long pause, “the power of education is quite possibly...” Here, he paused again to puff his pipe, “...unique.” He let that sink in then put his pipe down on the desk before going on. “There is a passage in the *Talmud,*” he said, “that discusses how the rectangle does not occur in nature. It is an invention of man,” he said, “a geometric

[1] Martin Buber, adapted from the story “Conversion” in *Tales of the Hasidim, Vol. 1* (New York: Schocken, 2013), 200; Please note that each of the stories shared throughout this thesis are written in my own words, (unless otherwise indicated), and so represent my own written adaptations of stories I encountered both orally in the course of fieldwork and as written in Judaism’s sacred texts and other relevant sources (all of which are also appropriately cited).

invention of man." He reached for a tool and began scraping the ashes from his pipe. "Before I can even begin to answer your question," he said, engrossed in his work, "you need to stop thinking in a *rectangular way*. It's not something that you can '*rectangulate*'." Then he, the only rabbi for a thousand years to have written a commentary on the entire Babylonian Talmud, lit his pipe, and stated unequivocally, "There's *no passage* that talks about holiness, no single moment that defines it. Instead, the definition is spread throughout the tradition. This," he emphasized, "is very much on purpose, for it makes the answer conditional upon two things: first, that you are purified by the difficulty of the search, and second, you seek it not as an end to that search, but in the searching itself." Then, with a smile, but with the same weight of his unparalleled intellect, he said, "You're in good company if you don't know how to define it, for it is meant to be that way." Holiness, he explained, wasn't an answer to arrive at, but a process to participate in, known not *rectangularly*, but *experientially*, once the rectangular had been cast off in favor of a new way of seeing the world—not through the lens of man, said both the ancient Sages and the modern sage before me, but through the eyes of Heaven.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Seen as "the breath of their nostrils, their greatest joy and the finest portion of their lives,"[1] for many religious Jews, teaching and learning are not only "*a* divine commandment" but *the* divine commandment—equal to all other commandments combined.[2] As a sanctifying practice[3] that links them to Heaven,[4] "in studying, Jews see themselves as performing a holy act ordained by God."[5] Simply stated, "to Judaism uniquely among religions, the processes of learning are sacred and study a holy pursuit."[6] The verbiage of such statements—using words like "act," "performing" and "processes"—suggests not a vague, theoretical connection between education and the sacred, but a dynamic, living relationship between Judaic holiness and Jewish teaching and learning *practices*.

## The Question

Research in Jewish studies, however, has not specifically explored the relationship between Judaic holiness and Jewish teaching and learning *practices* from an in-depth, ethnographic perspective. This is a significant gap, especially when considered in light of the practice-oriented statements above that call teaching and learning an "*act* ordained by God" and a "holy *pursuit*." Instead, studies in Jewish education have primarily focused on teaching sacred content[7] or how holiness informs educational aims.[8] And while Fishbane[9] came close by describing a sacred approach to Jewish education, his research focused more on constructing a new theology for Judaism than specifically describing the sacred dimensions of Jewish teaching and learning practices. Furthermore, Jewish studies research on the sacred and education has seldom engaged deeply with how Judaic holiness is described in sacred Jewish texts and Jewish academic literature. This thesis addresses these gaps by exploring the practical dynamics of the sacred-education relationship from an in-depth, ethnographic perspective, grounded in a thorough understanding of the meaning of Judaic holiness in an educative context. In short, this thesis asks the following question: *what is the nature of the relationship between Judaic holiness and the dynamics of Jewish teaching and learning practices?*

## The Broader Discussion

Although this question investigates the sacred-education relationship in a specifically Jewish context, it is not intended to contribute solely to Jewish educational research. It acts

---

[1] Claude Goldsmid Montefiore and Herbert Loewe, introduction to *A Rabbinic Anthology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), xvii.
[2] From *kaneged kulam* (כנגד כולם), or "equal to them all," Talmudic scholars often infer that *khazal* (חז"ל) meant to say that the commandment to study (and, by derivation, to teach) Torah was equal in importance to all of the other commandments combined (see *Mishnah Peah* 1:1).
[3] Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book* (Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003), xvii-xxii.
[4] Max Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind* (New York: Bloch Publishing, 1972), 213.
[5] Barry Holtz, "Introduction: On Reading Jewish Texts" in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts,* ed. Barry Holtz (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984), 24.
[6] Milton Steinberg, *Basic Judaism* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947), 67.
[7] Louis Alan Nagel, "Teaching the Sacred: A Phenomenological Study of Synagogue-School Teachers" (doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park 2009), 14.
[8] Isa Aron, Steven Cohen, Lawrence Hoffman, and Ari Kelman. *Sacred Strategies: Transforming synagogues from functional to visionary* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010).
[9] Michael Fishbane, *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

instead as an in-depth look into a single case of the relationship between the sacred and educative practices more broadly conceived. Religious education[1] and ethics education,[2] for instance, focus on sacred content as the point of connection between education and the sacred. In moral education, Osguthorpe and Sanger outline a moral approach to teaching and learning, but do not address the sacred in that approach.[3] In the field of spirituality in education, Palmer specifically discusses how one's approach to education can be informed by a belief in the sacred. However, his approach is intended to be universally applicable, and so does not illustrate a specific approach to sacred teaching and learning within a single community, culture or religious context.[4] Postlethewaite has illustrated a sacred approach to education in a specifically Bahai context. However, he focused on the beliefs and practices of a single individual, rather than the Bahai community generally.[5]

In short, the sacred-education relationship has been investigated from a variety of perspectives. However, the role of the sacred in educative practice within a specific community based on that community's unique beliefs about the sacred and its role in teaching and learning is under-investigated. This is the unique contribution of this thesis. While it does so in a specific case of Orthodox Judaism in present-day Jerusalem, it has wider implications for education research and practice outside of this specific context. As a facet of one's worldview, an actualized belief in the sacred—especially as part of a broader adherence to a sacred religious tradition like Judaism—has the potential to influence one's actions,[6] dispositions and choices, particularly when it comes to teaching and learning. Jewish perspectives tend to illustrate the sacred not as a way of validating one's personal methodological preferences in educative practice, but as a rich and dynamic interplay between scripturally prescribed practices and human, volitional action. In light of this understanding, together with the above passages that describe teaching and learning as a "sacred act" and a "holy pursuit," this thesis investigates *the nature and dynamics of the relationship between Judaic holiness and Jewish teaching and learning practices* to explore the potential effects that an actualized belief in the sacred can have on educative practices.

## An Invitation

In light of the experiential, practice-oriented nature of both Judaic holiness and Jewish teaching and learning practices, I invite readers, just as little Mordechai from the prologue, to draw as near as possible to those who consider teaching and learning to be a sacred activity, and who teach and learn in accordance with that belief. To this end, rather than simply explaining the sacred-education relationship in detached, analytical prose, I invite readers to participate in rich, narrative descriptions of ethnographic field studies, that they might experience this sacred dimension of educative practice for themselves. Immersed in these

---

[1] Liam Gearon, *On Holy Ground: The Theory and Practice of Religious Education* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013).
[2] John Tillson, "In favour of ethics education, against religious education," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 45, no. 4 (2011): 675-688.
[3] Richard Osguthorpe and Matthew Sanger, "The Moral Nature of Teacher Candidate Beliefs About the Purposes of Schooling and Their Reasons for Choosing Teaching as a Career," *Peabody Journal of Education* 88, no. 2 (2013): 180-197. See also Matthew Sanger and Richard Osguthorpe, "Inquiring into the Moral Work of Teaching and Teacher Education" in *The Moral Work of Teaching and Teacher Education: Preparing and Supporting Practitioners* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 3-13.
[4] Parker Palmer, "The Grace of Great Things: Reclaiming the Sacred in Knowing, Teaching, and Learning" in *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education*, ed. Steven Glazer (New York: Penguin, 1999), 20.
[5] Robert Postlethwaite, "Giving Primacy to the Sacred: Some Implications for Teaching" (doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2003).
[6] Martin Hauselmann and Carmen Tanner, "Taboos and Conflicts in decision-making: sacred values, decision difficulty and emotions," *Judgment and Decision Making* 3, no. 1 (2008): 51-63.

stories, you, the reader, are invited to read, sing, teach, dance, walk and learn with those who approach teaching and learning in light of the sacred, as though you had been present in the moment when these stories first happened. This expository method and structure flows out of the Jewish scriptural tradition. For in reading, the Talmud explains, the voices of a story's characters come to life, "speaking as if they were standing right in front of you."[1] In this way, this thesis is an invitation to participate with these stories, enrolling as a student in three of Jerusalem's *yeshivot*[2] to interact with rabbis and fellow students as though personally present. In order to make this experiential exploration most beneficial, this thesis begins by laying a contextual foundation for the rich narratives and analyses that follow.

## Thesis Outline

Chapter One introduces the research question and outlines the remainder of the thesis. Chapter Two outlines key literature about the sacred-education relationship, including research on the sacred, Judaic holiness and Jewish education. It begins with an overview of academic literature on the meaning of the terms "holiness" and "sacred," drawing upon theology, anthropology, sociology and philosophy. The next section specifically outlines the meaning of Judaic holiness, highlighting key differences and similarities between its various dimensions and the broader understandings of holiness and sanctity outlined earlier. The chapter then briefly outlines the relationship between education and the sacred, first in education research generally, then in a specifically Jewish context. However, as these dimensions are the subject-matter of this thesis, they appear in more detail later on, illustrated in the rich, narrative context from which they emerged in the course of study.

Chapter Three outlines my research methods, providing another foundational piece preparatory to immersing oneself in the narrative and analysis of the findings chapters. It first outlines the importance of sacred texts to the Jewish educative tradition,[3] then describes how I collected data.[4] Following this description of the ethnographic process, the chapter outlines how this data grew into the narratives and analyses in later findings chapters through transcription and thematic analysis. Finally, this chapter ends by explaining the importance of story and narrative in the Jewish tradition and why it acts as an appropriate expository method in this context.[5]

Chapters four, five and six illustrate thesis findings. Each focuses on one of the three *yeshivot* where I studied, conducted interviews and attended classes in Jerusalem. All follow the same structure. Each begins with a detailed narrative intended to invite the reader to experience the sacred dimension of teaching and learning highlighted in the story. This is followed by a brief sketch of the *yeshiva* learning environment as well as a description of the denomination of Judaism to which it belongs. Based on its opening narrative, each chapter then outlines six themes gleaned from interview and fieldnote analysis pertaining to the specific *yeshiva* in question.[6] Importantly, each of these narratives illustrates a different

---

[1] *B. Shek.* 7b.
[2] *yeshivot* (ישבות), the plural form of *yeshiva* (ישבה), is a Jewish religious school, typically for men aged 18-30
[3] This section highlights uniquely Jewish approaches to sacred text as well as the importance of the Hebrew language to the interpretation of such texts.
[4] This included taking field notes, conducting qualitative interviews and acting as a participant observer in traditional Jewish learning environments.
[5] This, again, is preparatory to the findings chapters that follow.
[6] Although each of these eighteen themes is unique, some overlap and reiterate similar principles, as each of the chapters is based on a different learning community. Rather than being pedantic and repetitious, this thematic commonality illustrates particularly strong elements of the sacred-education relationship in practice, which are later explored more deeply.

aspect of the ethnographic process: Chapter Four, a ritual; Chapter Five, an interview; and Chapter Six, a typical day in *yeshiva*. As such, these narratives not only invite readers to experience these stories as though they had been present, but also provide a detailed glimpse into different elements of the ethnographic process.

Chapter Four: *Farbrengen* begins by describing an educational ritual practiced at the *Merkaz David yeshiva* called a *farbrengen.* In this ritual, rabbis and their disciples teach and learn late into the night, and through a combination of singing, dancing and other ritual acts come to experience what they describe as a uniquely sacred dimension of their educative tradition. The analysis that follows includes six themes. The first, "Practice and Divine Proximity," describes how Judaic holiness is realized by volitional human action, especially in the context of educative practice. "Spatial and Temporal Sanctity" explains sacred facets of the environment in which such educative practice is carried out. The following two themes, "Storytelling and Inheritance" and "Singing and Sacred Physicality" outline the sacred dimensions of specific educative practices. The chapter's final themes, "*Khavrusa* and the Rabbi-Disciple Relationship" and "Worthiness and Dispositional Consecration" illustrate the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions of educative practice, respectively.

Chapter Five: A Walk in Holiness begins with a story that illustrates one interview in great detail. This interview was exceptional in that, rather than explain the significance of the sacred to education, a rabbi took me on a walk through his own neighborhood to show me what holiness looked like in the immediacy of lived experience. Rather than take readers on similar walks through Jerusalem's ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods myself, this chapter's narrative represents my best attempt at replicating that process for them in prose. After a brief sketch of the *Or Akiva yeshiva,* this chapter's analysis begins by illustrating the unique temporal dimension of Jewish education and its relationship to holiness in "Living Remembrance" and "Consecratory Purpose and Eternity." It then introduces a new way of understanding the sanctifying capacity of the educative act in "Sanctification by Functionality." "Sanctity through Orality" explores a sacred educative practice specifically prescribed in Jewish scripture. "Purposive Difficulty" describes a Jewish perspective on the value of difficulty in the educative process. Finally, "*Imitatio Dei* and Perceptual Theosimilitude," introduces the idea of becoming like God as a fundamental purpose behind sacred education in the Jewish tradition.

Chapter Six: Among Holy Men begins by describing the events of a typical day at the *Osher Shlomo yeshiva.* There follows a sketch of the *yeshiva*, whose primarily *Chassidic* philosophy of education heavily influences this chapter's analysis. That analysis begins by describing a *Chassidic* perspective on the experiential, personified nature of Judaic holiness in "Holiness as Extra-Propositional Experience" and "Personified Sanctity." It continues by describing in greater detail a theme that appears in previous chapters in a theme entitled "*Chinuch* (חינוך): Awakening the Dormant Inherent." The next theme, "Holiness as Teaching and Learning," illustrates a unique perspective shared by several rabbis at *Osher Shlomo* that holiness itself is a divine pedagogic act. The final themes illustrate two ways in which those at *Osher Shlomo* believe God to be involved in their education: "Teaching, Learning and Reciprocal Sanctity" and "Divine Pedagogic Influence."

Lastly, Chapter Seven: Conclusion begins with a story that portrays the "dormant inherent" dimension of education's sanctity in the Jewish perspective. The chapter then outlines six ways in which sanctification contributes to the teaching and learning process by changing one's methods, environment, pedagogic encounters, capacity, understanding and ontology. It concludes by discussing the contributions of this thesis to educational research, its limitations and suggestions for future research. This final chapter is followed by an epilogue that concludes the thesis in the same narrative dimension by which it began.

# CHAPTER TWO: EDUCATION AND THE SACRED

To provide a foundation for the ethnographic narratives that follow, this chapter outlines the relationship between education and the sacred. It does so both in academic literatures and in a range of Jewish academic and religious literatures. It begins by highlighting the importance of conceptualizing the sacred across academic disciplines and briefly explores its value across these disciplines today. The chapter then describes the sacred from a linguistic perspective. It begins with a panoramic view of its etymological development in various languages relevant to contemporary Western usage of the term, followed by a closer look at the linguistic origins of Judaic holiness, or *kedusha* (קדושה).[1]

The next section describes academic conceptualizations of the sacred[2] based on Pargament and Mahoney's[3] "core and ring" approach.[4] With this foundation, the following section specifically explores literature on Judaic holiness.[5] With this foundational understanding of the sacred and holiness in place, the chapter then explores the relationship between education and the sacred from a range of education research perspectives.[6] It is, again, precisely this gap that this study seeks to address. This chapter closes by briefly highlighting the role of the sacred in Jewish education specifically. All of this, again, is intended to provide the reader sufficient background and context with which to better understand the ethnographic narratives and analyses that follow.

## Importance of Conceptualizing the Sacred

Although some in psychology of religion and religious education maintain the sacred to be "a pre-modern matter,"[7] assaulted and denied "in order to seek the legitimacy of new forms of knowledge,"[8] many consider the sacred as not only relevant,[9] but undergoing a renaissance in recent years.[10] "The holy," wrote Kamper and Wulf, "is not something that belongs to the past. Rather, it certainly belongs to the present."[11] Along these lines, some

---

[1] These analyses illustrate the central role that religion and theism have played in the linguistic development of "the sacred," both in the specific case of Judaic holiness and with the sacred more generally.

[2] Because of the interdisciplinarity of academic research on the sacred, these sections are not organized by field (i.e., psychology and the sacred, anthropology and the sacred, etc.). Instead, they are combined to give a more holistic view of these overlapping, interdisciplinary perspectives.

[3] Kenneth Pargament and Annette Mahoney, "Sacred Matters: Sanctification as a Vital Topic for the Psychology of Religion," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion,* 15 (2005): 179-199.

[4] This perspective illustrates first the core meaning of the sacred (i.e., Rappaport's Ultimate Sacred Postulates, Otto's *ganz andere,* etc.), followed by its peripheral "ring" elements (i.e., ritual, perception, etc.) in relation to that "core."

[5] In this literature, one perspective emerges with God as the "core" of Judaic holiness, surrounded by a "ring" of practices and beliefs oriented to God. Appreciating the central role that God can play in Judaic holiness is crucial to understanding the dynamics of the sacred in Jewish educative practices.

[6] While several key bodies of literature come close to addressing this relationship, namely, religious, spiritual, holistic and moral education, it is religiously-informed education that comes closest to addressing the practical relationship between conceptualizations of the sacred and teaching and learning practice specifically.

[7] Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf, *Das Heilige. Seine Spur in der Moderne,* ed. Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf (Bodenheim: Athenäum, 1997) as cited in Espen Dahl, *In Between: The Holy Beyond Modern Dichotomies*, trans. Brian McNeil (Oslo: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 2008), 12-13.

[8] Gearon, *On Holy Ground: The Theory and Practice of Religious Education*, 3-4.

[9] Michael Stausberg. "The Sacred and the Holy – from Around 1917 to Today," *Religion*, 47, no. 4 (2017): 550.

[10] Dahl, *In Between: The Holy Beyond Modern Dichotomies*; note also that the entire August 2017 issue of *Religion* was dedicated to "the sacred."

[11] Kamper and Wulf, *Das Heilige. Seine Spur in der Moderne.*

contemporary philosophers oppose what Ricoeur called the "annihilation of the sacred,"[1] advocating not its excision from modernity, but a rediscovery[2] which is already well underway. Although many book titles use the word "sacred" without ever directly addressing the topic,[3] contemporary research on the sacred is dynamic and flourishing, addressing its role in secularization,[4] political theory,[5] theology,[6] nature,[7] religious science,[8] religious studies,[9] psychology[10] and sociology.[11] In short, the sacred "continues to form part of our register of experiences,"[12] and so is emerging from its previous (and rather ironic) "taboo"[13] among academics to play a renewed role in research across many disciplines today.

## Value of Conceptualizing the Sacred

Like Pargament et al,[14] this investigation rests on two Jamesian assumptions. First, that one can appreciate the role the sacred plays in various contexts without necessarily committing to any one metaphysical interpretation of its origins.[15] Second, that the practices and principles illustrated here can be of practical value to a wider audience when applied in other contexts.[16] Research in various academic disciplines has "underscored the meaning and power that perceptions of the sacred hold in peoples' lives."[17] Such research has explored the role of the sacred in well-being,[18] psychotherapy,[19] psychology,[1] meaning-making,[2] altruism,[3]

---

[1] Paul Ricoeur, *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 48.
[2] Roger Scruton, *The Soul of the World* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014), 23; see also Stuart A. Kauffman, *Reinventing the sacred: A new view of science, reason, and religion* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).
[3] Stausberg, "The Sacred and the Holy – from Around 1917 to Today," 550.
[4] Kim Knott, "The Secular Sacred: In between or Both/And?" in *Social Identities between the Sacred and the Secular,* ed. Abby Day, Giselle Vincett and Christopher R. Cotter (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 145–160.
[5] Tuomas Äystö, "The Sacred Orders of Finnish Political Discourse on the Revision of the Blasphemy Law," *Numen* 64, no. 2–3 (2017): 294–321.
[6] Patrick Lynch, S.J. and Pat Mizak, "Catholic/Jesuit Values in an Introductory Religious Studies Course," *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 15 (2012): 225–240.
[7] Siv Ellen Kraft, "The Making of a Sacred Mountain: Meanings of Nature and Sacredness in Sápmi and Northern Norway," *Religion,* 40, no. 1 (2010): 53–61.
[8] Wolfgang Gantke and Vladislav Serikov, *Das Heilige als Problem der gegenwärtigen Religionswissenschaft* (Frakfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015).
[9] Gregory W. Dawes, "The Sacred, the Occult and the Distinctiveness of Religion," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 46, no. 1 (2017): 19–36.
[10] Ann Taves, "Building Blocks of Sacralities" in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (New York: Guilford Press, 2013), 138–161.
[11] Gordon Lynch and Ruth Sheldon, "The Sociology of the Sacred: A Conversation with Jeffrey Alexander," *Culture and Religion* 14, no. 3 (2013): 253–267.
[12] Espen Dahl, *In Between: The Holy Beyond Modern Dichotomies*, 9.
[13] Jeffrey Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010), 9.
[14]Kenneth Pargament, Doug Oman, Julie Pomerleau, and Annette Mahoney, "Some contributions of a psychological approach to the study of the sacred," *Religion*, 47, no. 4 (2017): 718.
[15] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902).
[16] William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (New York, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907).
[17] Pargament et al., *Some Contributions of a Psychological Approach to the Sacred*, 733.
[18] Annette Mahoney, Kenneth Pargament and Krystal Hernandez, "Heaven on Earth: Beneficial Effects of Sanctification for Individual and Interpersonal Well-being" in *Oxford Book of Happiness,* ed. Susan David, Ilona Boniwell and Amanda Ayers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 397-410.
[19] Kenneth Pargament, *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred* (New York: Guildford Press. 2007).

vocation,[4] time-management,[5] and familial relationships.[6] However, the role of the sacred *specifically in educative practice* remains under-examined. This is significant, as contemporary educationalists have lamented their inability to approach teaching and learning in light of the sacred, whether because of a belief in its irreconcilability with contemporary paradigms, or simply for not knowing how to do so.[7] This thesis addresses such issues by investigating the dynamics of the sacred-education relationship among several communities who consider "the processes of learning [as] sacred and study a holy pursuit."[8]

## The Sacred: An Etymology

Any attempt to study the sacred, wrote Colpe, must be taken "case by case...and may well come out differently in every instance."[9] A key part of this "case by case" approach lies in understanding the linguistic foundations of terms like "sacred" and "holy." One "must distinguish between the language spoken by the people who are the objects of study," continued Colpe, "and the one spoken by the scholar...keeping one's own definition of what is sacred separate from the definition that is given by the culture under scrutiny."[10] To this end, this section first addresses the etymology of the sacred more broadly conceived, then more specifically turns its focus on Judaic holiness (*kedusha* – קדושה). Both of these conceptualizations of the sacred share an etymological connection to theistic assumptions. This understanding is key to appreciating the way in which the Jewish communities described in later chapters approach the sacred in education. Again, the purpose of this etymological review is not to give "excessive weight to the origin of a word as against its actual semantic value and usage."[11] Instead, it is to lay a foundation for exploring its meaning in the midst of its usage in the situated context of the ethnographic narratives and analyses that follow, which usage, wrote Davidson, is ultimately "the only safe guide."[12]

---

[1] Pargament and Mahoney, "Sacred Matters: Sanctification as a Vital Topic for the Psychology of Religion," 179-199.
[2] Julie Pomerleau, Kenneth Pargament, and Annette Mahoney, "Seeing Life Through a Sacred Lens: The Spiritual Dimension of Meaning" in *To Think, To Cope, To Understand: Meaning in Positive Psychology and Existential Psychotherapy,* ed. Pninit Russo-Netzer, Stefan Schulenberg, and Alexander Batthyany (New York: Spring Press, 2016), 35-57.
[3] Nalini Tarakeshwar, Aaron Swank, Kenneth Pargament, and Annette Mahoney, "The Sanctification of Nature and Theological Conservatism: A Study of Opposing Religious Correlates of Environmentalism," *Review of Religious Research* 42 (2001): 387-404; see also Nathan Todd, Jacyln Houston, and Charlynn Odahl-Ruan, "Preliminary Validation of the Sanctification of Social Justice Scale," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6, no. 3 (2014): 245-256.
[4] Amy Wrzesniewski, Clark McCauley, Paul Rozin, and Barry Schwartz, "Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work," *Journal of Research in Personality,* 31 (1997): 21-33.
[5] Annette Mahoney, Kenneth Pargament, Brenda Cole, Tracey Jewell, Gina Magyar, Nalini Tarakeshwar, Nicole Murray-Swank, and Russ Phillips, "A Higher Purpose: The Sanctification of Strivings in a Community Sample," *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 15 (2005): 239-262.
[6] Annette Mahoney, Kenneth Pargament, Tracey Jewell, Aaron Swank, Erin Scott, Erin Emery, and Mark Rye, "Marriage and the Spiritual Realm: The Role of Proximal and Distal Religious Constructs in Marital Functioning," *Journal of Family Psychology* 13 (1999): 321-338.
[7] Alden Legrand Richards, "The Secularization of the Academic Worldview: The History of a Process and its Consequences for the Study of Education" (doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1982).
[8] Steinberg, *Basic Judaism,* 67.
[9] Carsten Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 12 (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, [1987] 2005), 7964.
[10] ibid., 7965.
[11] James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 102.
[12] Andrew Bruce Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1904), 257.

## *"Sacred": An Etymological Overview*

"Sacred and holy," wrote Molendijk, "are near equivalents,"[1] and as such can be used synonymously in many instances. Oxtoby agreed, saying that much of the "semantic differentiation between *sacred* and *holy* is limited to English and is not necessarily found in other languages."[2] In Latin, for instance, the terms *sacrum* and *sanctum* (the equivalents for "sacred" and "holy," respectively) are derived from the same Indo-European root *sak.* As such, each describes different aspects of the same phenomenon.[3] A brief look at parallel terms in several modern European languages further supports this synonymy. Colpe maintained that there is no noteworthy distinction between these two terms in the Romance languages, while the Russian *sviaty* combines them both in a single term. German, the language in which both Otto and Eliade published, employs a single term (*heilig*) for both sacred and holy, as well.[4] With this understanding, the terms "holy" and "sacred" are used synonymously from this point forward.

Looking more closely at its Latin roots, *sacrum* refers to "what belonged to the gods or was in their power."[5] This connection to deity is key to a Latin conceptualization of the sacred. Even the term "profane" is related to deity, as anciently it described the act of placing something before (or *pro*) the outer sanctuary (or *fanum*) of a temple dedicated to a god.[6] The term *sacrosanctus* (from which the English term "sacrosanct" is derived) links the process of consecration to *sanctum*, which again is linked to deity. Personified sanctity through the pronunciation *sacer esto* signified a person being given to a deity, while sacrificial dimensions of the sacred such as *ver sacrum* and *devotio* were teleologically linked to deity as well. In this sense, the Latin *sacrum,* though possessed of many peripheral elements (i.e., sacrifice, sacred space, personification, etc.) is fundamentally based in theistic assumptions.

The Greek *hieros* (ἱερός), *hagios* (ἅγιος) and *hosios* (ὅσιος) all refer either to things dedicated to the gods, behavior conforming to their demands or simply a way of describing the gods themselves.[7] The Durkheimian sacred-profane dyad had little place in early Greek, and though later words like *bebelos* (βέβηλος) and *koinos* (κοινός) are often translated as "profane" or "common," their meaning is not necessarily in direct opposition to *hieros* (ἱερός).[8] Arabic also depicts the sacred as connected to God through purification in the root *qds* (قدس), rather than the Durkheimian notion of separateness or Polynesian "taboo," for which it employs *hrm* – حرم, a different term altogether.[9] This thread connecting the sacred to deity extends even to Zoroastrian language *Avestan*, which uses the term *yaz* to describe something worthy of veneration, most often a deity.[10] The Runic *hailag,* Hittite *parkui,* Sumerian *melam* and ancient Egyptian *dsr* all share a common meaning that denotes a connection to deity.[11]

---

[1] Arie L. Molendijk, "The Notion of the Sacred" in *Holy Ground: Reinventing Ritual Space in Modern Western Culture,* ed. Paul Post and Arie L. Molendijk (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 55-89.
[2] Willard G. Oxtoby, "The Idea of the Holy" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 6 (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, [1987] 2005), 4099.
[3] see Colpe, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 7969. While *sanctum* describes a divine power, *sacrum* focuses on the human veneration of that power.
[4] ibid.
[5] ibid., 7964.
[6] ibid.
[7] ibid., 7967.
[8] ibid.
[9] Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London: Willams & Norgate, 1863). See especially *qds* and *hrm*.
[10] see V.F. Büchner, "Yazdān," in *Encyclopedia of Islam, First Edition* (Boston: E.J. Brill, 1913-1936).
[11] Colpe, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 7964.

The etymology of the sacred in several modern European languages also reflects this basic meaning of being connected to deity. The French *saint* and the Italian and Spanish *santo* reflect their Latin root *sanctus,* which "had ultimately come to mean a primarily divine quality."[1] And while Germanic languages (i.e., the German-Dutch *heilig* and the Swedish *helig*) share a connection to an early root meaning "wholeness," that very root can also mean both "godly" and "divine."[2] The English word "sacred" first appeared in the late 14th or early 15th centuries, the meanings of which all made reference to some connection to deity.[3] Oxtoby divided the English meaning of "holy" into three categories: "first, the attributes of God (who is definitively holy); second, the attributes of things that derive their holiness from association with God; and third, the attributes of people and actions conforming to what is held to be God's expectation."[4] In short, even the English terms "sacred" and "holy" have their origins in theistic assumptions.

This brief overview of the etymology of the sacred illustrates two fundamental points upon which an understanding of Judaic holiness can be built. First, the similar etymologies of the terms "sacred" and "holy," as well as those languages that make no distinction between them, suggests that these terms can be used synonymously, as Molendijk recommended.[5] Second, examples from both ancient and modern languages illustrate that at least one prominent thread that runs through many linguistic conceptualizations of the sacred is a connection to deity. This suggests that considering theistic assumptions is an academically responsible approach to conceptualizing the sacred. This is crucial in the present case, in light of the following section, which illustrates the central role that God plays in understanding Judaic holiness.

## *Judaic Holiness (kedusha—קדושה): An Etymological Overview*

The Hebrew root *qdš* קדש "runs like a golden thread in the tapestry of Judaism."[6] Appearing 842 times in the Hebrew Bible,[7] however, this golden thread can sometimes appear so dynamic and multifaceted as to become "uncertain, obscure and difficult to discover."[8] This brief overview of the etymology of the Hebrew root *qdš* קדש borrows from Pargament and Mahoney's "core and ring" approach.[9] As such, it illustrates God as the core of Judaic holiness and that its peripheral "ring" characteristics are made holy by virtue of their connection to God.

"The root *qdš,*" wrote Parekh, "is primarily used in relation to God, indicating His ontological existence and nature, and secondarily for people, places, and objects related to

---

[1] Colpe, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 7964.
[2] ibid., 7970.
[3] "sacred, adj. and n." OED Online. January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2355/view/Entry/169556?rskey=VFNm7f&result=2 (accessed January 19, 2018).
[4] summary given by Oxtoby, *The Idea of the Holy*, 4098.
[5] Molendijk, *The Notion of the Sacred*, 55-89.
[6] R. Kahn, "Kodesh, Mishpat and Chessed: A Philological Approach to Some Attributes of God," *Religion in Life,* 52 (1955-1956): 575.
[7] H. Müller, "קדש *qdš* holy," in *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament, Vol. 3* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 1103-1118.
[8] see, for example, Rudolph Kittel, "The Holiness of God," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*, ed. Johann J. Herzog, Philip Schaff, Albert Hauck, Samuel Macauley Jackson, Charles Colebrook Sherman, and George William Gilmore et al. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908), 5:316-317.
[9] Pargament and Mayoney, *Sacred Matters: Sanctification*, 179-199.

Him."[1] This understanding of the importance of deity to Judaic holiness comes from related ancient Near Eastern languages. In Akkadian, "the original concept" of holiness refers to "the ontological loftiness and sublimity of a deity." And "objects, persons and places come to be in the category of holy by their dedication or relationship to a deity."[2] "In Ugaritic," wrote Ringgren, "the gods themselves are *qdš* and everything that shows themselves to be in a close relationship with them, and belongs to them in nature, or was dedicated to them."[3] Early Semitic inscriptions use the root *qdš* to refer to places, things and people dedicated to God, or simply to God Himself,[4] while the Qumran literature considers a person or an object holy when placed in relation to God.[5] Alternative meanings of the root *qdš,* which refer to purity, separateness and obedience to God's commandments, are all fundamentally linked to this core meaning, namely, that God is at the center of Judaic holiness, and that all other holiness comes about by virtue of a connection to Him.

Gesenius' understanding of the root קדש *qdš* as "clean" or "pure"[6] can be traced to the Akkadian terms *qadašu,* (clear, bright) and *quddušu* (to cleanse, to be bright,[7] or to purify[8]). However, considering other usages in relation to God and that God is never alternatively called *tahor* (an ancient Hebrew term for "pure" or "clean"[9]), "purity seems to be a derived meaning."[10] One reading of these sources suggests that purity is only a peripheral element of ancient Near Eastern holiness, subsidiary and preparatory to creating a connection to God who, according to Baudissin, is the source of that holiness.[11]

While some Biblical scholars have proposed that קדש *qdš* comes from the root *qd* קד, meaning "to cut off" or "separate,"[12] or even חדש *khdš*, meaning "new" and therefore "separate" from the ordinary world,[13] such connections do not follow Hebrew linguistic norms.[14] As such, "the theory of קדש *qdš* as 'separateness' is now generally abandoned,"[15] considered "too speculative to satisfy present-day philologists."[16] In contrast to this perspective, Parekh has posited that, considering the Biblical creation narrative, קדש *qdš* was

---

[1] Samson C. Parekh, "The Lexical and Theological Significance of the Root קדש in the Book of Isaiah" (doctoral dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1998), 7.
[2] ibid., 7.
[3] Helmer Ringgren, "קדש *qdš*," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer, 1995), 1182-1199.
[4] Parekh, *Lexical and Theological Significance*, 33-37.
[5] Wolf Baudissin, *Studien zur semitischen Religions-geschichte*, 44. see also Hänel, *Die Religion der Heiligkeit*, 44.
[6] William Gesenius, *A Hebrew and English lexicon of the Old Testament,* trans. Edward Robinson (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1871), 913.
[7] S. Barabas, "Holiness," in *Zondervan International Encyclopedia of Bible* 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1975), 174; see also, for example, Isaiah 6:1-3; Ezekiel 1:25-28; Daniel 6:9-10.
[8] C.R. North, "Isaiah," in *Interpreter's Bible Dictionary, 2* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1986), 733.
[9] Baruch A. Levine, "The Language of Holiness: Perception of the Sacred in the Hebrew Bible," in *Backgrounds for the Bible,* ed. Michael Patrick O'Connor and David Noel Freedman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 243-443.
[10] Parekh, *Lexical and Theological Significance*, 3.
[11] Baudissin, *Studien zur semitischen Religions-geschichte,* 45. see also Hänel, *Die Religion der* Heiligkeit, 44.
[12] ibid.
[13] ibid.
[14] Otto Procksch, "Hagios" *TDNT,* 1:89; see also Helmer Ringgren, *Israelite Religion.* trans. David Green [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966; reprint, London: S.P.C.K., 1974], 73-74.
[15] Philip Peter Jenson, "Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World" in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement 106* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 48; see also E. Jan Wilson, "*Holiness" and "Purity" in Mesopotamia* (Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1994), 85.
[16] A. van Selms, "The Expression 'The Holy One of Israel'," in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala,* ed. W.C. Delsman et al., Alter Orient und Altes Testament, ed. Kurt Bergerhof, M. Dietrich and O. Loretze, vol. 211 (Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1982), 257.

"seen in reference to God before the concept of otherness or separateness came into play."[1] The concept of separateness, then, like purity, seems a preparatory condition for connection to God, rather than a fundamental definition of the nature of holiness itself.

In short, through a review of Akkadian, Ugaritic and early Semitic inscriptions, Parekh wrote, "It seems that originally *qdš* was used in an existential-ontological sense for a deity in the divine realm and for the phenomena placed into relationship with it for its service, and then it was used in a functional sense to denote separateness and purity."[2] In other words, the etymological core of Judaic holiness is God. And while other dimensions of the sacred surround that core, their sanctity is derived from a connection to Him.

## Academic Conceptualizations of the Sacred

This section explores literature about the meaning and function of the sacred from academic perspectives. Again, borrowing from Pargament and Mahoney's "core and ring" approach,[3] this section first illustrates the "core" of the sacred from a standpoint that remains open to both theistic and non-theistic approaches.[4] This "core" (what Smart has called "the mythic or narrative dimension" of the sacred)[5] includes theistic assumptions, non-theistic spirituality, a source of efficacious power, or simply what Dahl described as "something more and different."[6] Next, this section focuses on the peripheral "ring" dimensions of the sacred. It organizes these elements into four categories taken from a combination of Smart's *Dimensions of the Sacred* and those recently proposed by Engler and Gardiner.[7] These categories describe the sacred as behavioral, polarized, contextualized and experiential. This framework provides a foundational context for understanding the core and peripheral "ring" dimensions of Judaic holiness illustrated in the section that follows.

### *The Core of the Sacred*

Contemporary academic approaches to the sacred place various constructs at their core.[8] Some sociological perspectives place "achieved social objects" at that core,[9] while theologians like Söderblom place God in that role,[10] seeing holiness not as an "attribute of human conduct" but as "*an attribute of divinity*."[11] Along these same lines, Rappaport posited that any Ultimate Sacred Postulate (for instance, God) is at the core of the sacred.[12] Harrington agreed, writing simply that "holiness is an active and powerful force which

---

[1] Parekh, *Lexical and Theological Significance*, 15.
[2] ibid., 45.
[3] Pargament and Mayoney, *Sacred Matters: Sanctification as a Vital Topic*, 179-199.
[4] Pargament et al., *Some Contributions of a Psychological Approach to the Sacred.*
[5] Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996), 130.
[6] Dahl, *In Between: The Holy Beyond Modern Dichotomies, 9.*
[7] see Steven Engler and Mark G. Gardiner, "Semantics and the sacred," *Religion* 47, no. 4 (2017): 617-620. These categories are the ineffable, polarized, contextualized and experiential sacred.
[8] Pargament and Mayoney, *Sacred Matters: Sanctification*, 179-199.
[9] Anne W. Rawls, Adam Jeffery, and David Mann, "Locating the modern sacred: Moral/social facts and constitutive practices," *Journal of Classical Sociology* 16, no. 1 (2016): 67.
[10] Nathan Söderblom, "Holiness" in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* ed. James Hastings (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913), 731, quoting Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Reden über die Religion,* (Berlin, 1799).
[11] Oxtoby, *The Idea of the Holy,* 4098.
[12] Roy Rappaport, Ellen Messer, and Michael Lambek, *Ecology and the Sacred: Engaging the Anthropology of Roy A. Rappaport* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

originates with the gods."[1] While Pargament and Mahoney said that, "The core of the sacred consists of concepts of God, the divine, and transcendence," they also stated that "sacred matters...also encompass any object that takes on extraordinary character by virtue of its association with, or representation of, divinity."[2] This view reflects Eliade's illustration of the sacred as a volitional entity, or something "which manifests itself to us,"[3] as well as Nancy's later observation of the sacred as something which "*encounters* us,"[4] rather than simply waiting to be encountered.

Key anthropological conceptualizations of the sacred represent its core more generally as a source of efficacious power, often without taking a specifically theistic or non-theistic stance. Such approaches to the sacred include van der Leeuw's "power,"[5] Callois' "force with which man must reckon,"[6] Mauss' "inexhaustible source of power,"[7] and Rappaport's sacred as the emanating force that imbues "the sanctified" with its sanctity.[8] Some associate such power at the core of the sacred with the Polynesian term "*mana*... the Siouan *wakan,* Iroquois *orenda,* Aztec *nagual,* and Arabic *baraka*,"[9] each of which connotes a similar power to that which resides at the core of the English terms "sacred" and "holy." Otto "portrays the holy as a power far greater than, and lying far beyond, the human realm,"[10] using the term *numinous* to describe both that power as well as one's reaction to it.[11] As such a power, the sacred is seen to be what Callois called "eminently efficacious,"[12] or what Mauss termed "eminently effective."[13]

From this broader viewpoint, the sacred "does not imply the existence of, or even the belief in, God or gods or spirits, but the existence of, and belief in, a world that is organized in a hierarchy of differential values and of things that really exist, even when we have no empirical perception of them."[14] This hierarchical perspective still fits within Pargament and Mahoney's core-ring structure, with practices, dispositions and experiences oriented around a core at the top of this qualitative hierarchy. So, while "in the English-speaking world, reference to the holy has [often] implied an appreciation of divine potency as a reality,"[15] there is room for both theistic and non-theistic conceptualizations at the core of the sacred. In short, this core, though classically seen as inherently bound together with theistic assumptions, has been approached differently in modernity. Yet, from this reading, there remains a central theme that, at the top of whatever qualitative hierarchy one may choose, the sacred has a core upon which its more peripheral dimensions depend. This lays a crucial foundation to approaching holiness from a Jewish perspective, as it creates a space for

---

[1] Hannah Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World* (Routledge: London, 2001), 206.
[2] Pargament and Mayoney, *Sacred Matters: Sanctification*, 179-199.
[3] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 7-12.
[4] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Notes on the Sacred," *Theory, Culture & Society* 30, no. 5 (2013): 157.
[5] Gerardus van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology,* ed. Ninian Smart, John Evan Turner (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938).
[6] Roger Callois, *Man and the Sacred,* trans. Meyer Barash (New York: Free Press, 1959), 22.
[7] Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, [1902] 1972), 10.
[8] Rappaport et al., *Ecology and the Sacred.*
[9] Roy Wagner, "Mana" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 8 (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 2005), 5631.
[10] Oxtoby, *The Idea of the Holy,* 4096.
[11] ibid., 4097.
[12] Callois, *Man and the Sacred*, 20.
[13] Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 23-24.
[14] Bryan S. Rennie, "The sacred and sacrality: from Eliade to evolutionary ethology" *Religion* 47:4 (2017): 668.
[15] Oxtoby, *The Idea of the Holy*, 4096.

considering God in its conceptualization. The following paragraphs describe four of these peripheral dimensions: the behavioral, polarized, contextualized and experiential sacred.

## *The Behavioral Sacred*

The behavioral dimension of the sacred is linked to its "core" in that, as Eliade wrote, one tries "to live as much as possible *in* the sacred" by living "in close proximity" to it."[1] Paden divided the behavioral sacred into four categories: sanctifying something through one's actions, defending the sacred against violation, enhancing the status of that which is already sacred, and "responding to sacred prompts with appropriate behaviors."[2] Such human involvement and action is crucial to many conceptualizations of the sacred, especially when considered in relation to educative practice. "Theorists of religion since Emile Durkheim," wrote Morgan, "have made the point that the sacred is effervescent, and therefore in need of maintenance."[3] Although this maintenance of the effervescent sacred comes by means of volitional human action, that action, or what Culianu and Burgdoff call "orthopraxy," is often accompanied and aided by "orthodoxy," or a belief in the sacred's core dimension to which such acts are often tied.[4] Importantly, one of the most central of these beliefs regarding sacred behavior is *mimesis*,[5] or imitation of the core of the sacred, especially when considered as a deity. In this sense, wrote Rennie, "The end of religious behavior is not worship in the sense of self-abasement before, or propitiation of, an almighty power, but in the sense of producing a life worth living through theosis or the *imitatio*."[6] In short, sacred acts are sacred inasmuch as they are oriented toward its core. Importantly in the present context, this creates a unique space for teaching and learning to be considered in a sacred way, especially in situations like the Orthodox Jewish communities in this study where God plays a central role.

Furthermore, the action-oriented, behavioral dimension of the sacred includes ritual, or the treatment of certain elements of human experience in non-ordinary ways.[7] This often allows those who take part in such sacrally oriented acts to enter a unique plane of experience, or what Turner calls *liminality.*[8] One of the principle elements of this behavioral dimension of the sacred is sacrifice. While Girard painted sacrifice as having preceded the sacred,[9] maintaining that "violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred,"[10] sacrifice, wrote Carrasco, derives its significance and sanctity from the supernatural power to which it is given as a gift.[11] The role of this power to which sacred acts are oriented is further emphasized by van der Leeuw, who illustrated sacrifice as *do ut posis dare*, or "I give you power so that you can give it back to me."[12] In this sense, while volitional human behavior

---

[1] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane,* 12.
[2] Paden, *Shifting Worldviews: Modeling Sacrality*, 705.
[3] David Morgan, "Defining the Sacred in Fine Art and Devotional Imagery." *Religion* 47:7 (2017): 658.
[4] Ion Petru Culianu and Craig A. Burgdoff, "Sacrilege" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 12 (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 2005), 8010.
[5] Rennie, *The Sacred and Sacrality: from Eliade*, 677.
[6] ibid., 682.
[7] Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," *History of Religions* 20, no. 1, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (1980): 125.
[8] see Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 1967).
[9] Colpe, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 7964.
[10] René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred,* trans. by Patrick Gregory (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972), 31.
[11] David Carrasco, "Sacrifice" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*, ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 12 (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 2005), 8002.
[12] ibid., 8003.

and action play a central role in the sacred, their sanctity is still fundamentally linked to the core of the sacred, "with whom the giver seeks to enter into or remain in communion."[1]

## *The Polarized Sacred*

Long before Engler and Gardiner identified its polarized dimension,[2] Durkheim defined the sacred as that which stands out from the profane. "The sacred and the profane," he wrote, "are always and everywhere conceived by the human intellect as separate genera, as two worlds with nothing in common. Nothing but their heterogeneity is left to define the relation between the sacred and the profane."[3] Other scholars of religion since Durkheim have similarly defined the sacred by differentiating it from the "secular,"[4] the "mundane,"[5] and the "ordinary."[6] Whether in Otto's *ganz andere* ("wholly other")[7] or the Polynesian *taboo*[8] used so often by Freud and his contemporaries,[9] the sacred in this sense is simply seen as "something remarkably specific and unique."[10]

Some researchers in religious studies have even described the sacred as a morally ambiguous category,[11] inherently set-apart from a mundane middle ground on either the one hand (i.e., morally negative, dangerous, etc.) or the other (i.e., morally good or uplifting).[12] In a similarly confusing dichotomy, religious scholars have also argued that the sacred is related to both purity[13] and impurity.[14] Yet, Douglas wrote that, while the concept of separateness is crucial to the sacred, "the next idea that emerges is of the Holy as wholeness and completeness,"[15] which comes from one's connection to the core of the sacred.[16] The separateness of sanctity in these cases, however, is not its principal feature, but one that serves a purpose. Whether in safety, purity, or wholeness, the Durkheimian sacred-profane dyad is not the core of the sacred, but one of its many peripheral elements connecting the Eliadean *homo religiosus* to that core, whether theistically understood or not.

## *The Experiential Sacred*

To Otto, holiness "eluded all apprehension through concepts"[17] and "required comprehension of a different kind"[1]—what Eliade called "an essentially experiential

---

[1] David Carrasco, "Sacrifice" in *Encyclopedia of Religion,* 8002.
[2] Engler and Gardiner, *Semantics and the sacred*, 625-629.
[3] Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1965), 36.
[4] Nicolas Jay Demerath III, "The Varieties of Sacred Experience: Finding the Sacred in a Secular Grove," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 39, no. 1 (2000): 3.
[5] Gordon Lynch, *On the Sacred* (London: Acumen, 2012), 32-33.
[6] Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 104.
[7] Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy (Das Heilige),* trans. John Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).
[8] Roy Wagner, "Taboo" in *Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 14 (Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 1987), 8947.
[9] Colpe, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 7974
[10] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy (Das Heilige),* 4.
[11] Elisa Heinämäki, "Durkheim, Bataille, and Girard on the Ambiguity of the Sacred: Reconsidering Saints and Demoniacs," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2015): 523.
[12] ibid., 523.
[13] Oxtoby, *The Idea of the Holy,* 4100.
[14] Colpe, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 7974.
[15] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Routledge, 1966), 63.
[16] ibid., 66. (see reference to *imitatio dei* in the case of Judaism)
[17] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* 87.

category"[2] of understanding. The sacred, wrote Petsch, is "that eternally incomprehensible which lies hidden behind everything comprehensible, and which we experience only emotionally and grasp intuitively."[3] This "experience of sacrality," added Rennie, is "an experience of something otherwise imperceptible."[4] "If one has not had the experience," wrote Oxtoby (a "non-rational", "non-sensory" experience,[5] Otto would add), "one cannot understand the subject."[6] Simply stated, the sacred "must ultimately be experienced,"[7] *directly* and immediately apprehended"[8] in what Hervieu-Léger and Knott both described as an "encounter" with the core of the sacred.[9]

"At times," wrote Colpe, people simply "reveal themselves in situations that appear to be of a different quality than ordinary ones."[10] For Smith, the central issue of sanctity is not simply differentiating such situations as *other*, but "adapting sacred ideals to the messy reality of lived experience."[11] While all this experientiality[12] is both rich and dynamic, it is also one of the most frustrating dimensions of the sacred for researchers. Such a dependence on firsthand experience makes the sacred almost "ineffable—beyond all language,"[13] and entirely unapproachable from a scholarly perspective, except, perhaps, through the "deep hanging out"[14] of in-depth ethnography. For this reason, some ethnographers maintain that the sacred is best encountered as manifest in people. To understand this dimension of the sacred, then, one cannot "learn it or acquire it, but [instead must] *teach oneself to it,*" coming not so much to possess it, but to be possessed by it.[15] Standing apart from Durkheim and Bataille's sacred, Girard's sacred "centers explicitly on persons deemed sacred,"[16] whose sanctity, Kant might say, rests on their morality.[17] But whether through morality or some other sanctifying process, the sanctity of persons is only a derivative, peripheral dimension of sanctity, and comes from an experiential encounter with the core of the sacred. The following section focuses on the context and conditions whereby such a connection with the core of the sacred can be achieved.

## *The Contextualized Sacred*

The experiential element of the sacred outlined earlier is based largely on the context in which that experience occurs.[18] This context is built upon human perception,[1] social

---

[1] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* 2.
[2] Culianu and Burgdoff, "*sacrilege" in Encyclopedia of Religion*, 8010.
[3] R. Petsch, "The Sacred," *The Monist* 34, 2 (1924): 314.
[4] Rennie, *The Sacred and Sacrality: from Eliade*, 669.
[5] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* (see chapters 2 and 3)
[6] Oxtoby, *The Idea of the Holy,* 4097.
[7] Jacqueline Mariña, "Holiness" in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*, edited by Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn (Hoboken, New Jersey, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 239.
[8] ibid., 236.
[9] Kim Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005), 87; see also Daniele Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 106.
[10] Colpe, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 7972.
[11] Culianu and Burgdoff, *"sacrilege" in Encyclopedia of Religion*, 8010.
[12] Engler and Gardiner, *Semantics and the Sacred*, 617-620.
[13] Marcus J. Borg, *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power—And How They Can Be Restored* (New York: Harper One, 2011), 74.
[14] see Clifford Geertz*, The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973).
[15] Wagner, "*Mana*" *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 5633.
[16] Heinämäki, *Durkheim, Bataille, and Girard*, 529.
[17] Immanuel Kant, *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion,* ed. and trans. Allen W. Wood (Yale University, Connecticut: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 409.
[18] Lynch, *On the Sacred*, 32-33.

interactions,[2] and the space[3] and time[4] in which these take place. In this sense, wrote Smith, "there is nothing that is sacred in itself, only things sacred in relation" to these contexts.[5] The unique contexts in which the sacred can flourish are "not arbitrary," wrote Brereton, dependent only upon the whimsical choice of one who claims it to be so.[6] The same context or circumstance (whether temporal, physical, or dispositional) can manifest itself as sacred to one, while simultaneously appearing ordinary to another.[7] This meeting place between the core of the sacred and those who participate relative to it is a combination of both their efforts combined. While the significance of such a circumstance "is grounded in its unique character, a character that no purely human action can confer on it,"[8] its sanctity is contingent upon one's capacity to discern it.

"The sacred," wrote Nancy, "is indexed to an encounter or a point of intensity via which the subject approaches what cannot be grasped in itself, but solely in and as this unfinishable approach."[9] In this sense, the "effervescent sacred" is a perennially present process, marking an interaction between the core of the sacred and the volitional involvement of human actors in relation to it. This is what Rennie referred to as "apperception," "attributive cognition," or the capacity to distinguish the sacred "from more direct, intersubjectively consistent perception."[10] This signifies more than Durkheim's claim that the sacred was "an empty category,"[11] contingent only upon a one-sided, one-time choice that could make anything sacred.[12] Instead, Smith argued, perceptual sanctification is an "exercise in the strategy of choice,"[13] made in reaction to some other consideration."[14] In this way, the sacred is not so much an arbitrary choice, but an awakening to an awareness of something unique. It is, according to Smith, "having our attention directed in a special way."[15] From this perspective, the sacred is "that which is apprehended as real by the consciousness of the aware, experiencing subject."[16]

## *Summary*

Some researchers in anthropology and religious studies have maintained that all dimensions of the sacred, whether at its core or its periphery, are "a symbolic projection of the clan or tribal group identity,"[17] a "product of group fantasy,"[18] even "superimposed upon

---

[1] Douglas A. Marshall, "Temptation, Tradition, and Taboo: A Theory of Sacralization," *Sociological Theory* 28, no.1 (2010): 65-66.
[2] Veikko Anttonen, "Sacred" in *Guide to the Study of Religion,* ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 276-277.
[3] Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, "Sacred Space and Place Attachment," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 13 (1993): 231-242.
[4] Hillel Schwartz, "Sacred Time" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 12 (New York: Macmillan, 2005), 7987.
[5] Smith, *The Bare Facts of Ritual,* 55.
[6] Joel P. Brereton, "Sacred Space" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol. 12. (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 7978.
[7] ibid., 7978.
[8] ibid.
[9] Nancy, *Notes on the Sacred*, 153.
[10] Rennie, *The Sacred and Sacrality: from Eliade*, 666.
[11] Heinämäki, *Durkheim, Bataille, and Girard*, 517.
[12] Culianu and Burgdoff *"sacrilege" in Encyclopedia of Religion*, 8010.
[13] Smith, *The Bare Facts of Ritual,* 55-57.
[14] ibid., 55.
[15] ibid., 55-57.
[16] Rennie, *The Sacred and Sacrality: from Eliade*, 668.
[17] Oxtoby, *The Idea of the Holy*, 4096.
[18] ibid.

nature."[1] However, seen in light of the other dimensions of the sacred, especially within the core and ring model illustrated here, it is often the case that the sincere believer-practitioner of sacrality approaches the prospect of sanctification more reverently than this. Such individuals believe themselves to be taking part in a meaningful process grounded in an equally meaningful qualitative category, namely, that which is sacred. Whether this category is based on theistic assumptions or not, academic literatures create a space for such considerations of significance and meaning when approaching an act, person, space or time in light of the sacred. More specifically to the present case, this creates a unique space in which the practices of teaching and learning can be approached, understood and realized in a sacred way.

## *Kedusha:* Judaic Holiness

This section specifically describes the various dimensions of Judaic holiness. In doing so, it relies upon the same "core and ring" framework used earlier. After a brief description of the importance of holiness to Judaism in general, the section begins by outlining God as the "core" of Judaic holiness. With this foundation, the peripheral, "ring" dimensions of Judaic holiness are made holy by virtue of a connection or proximity to God as that core. It then describes how to connect to or approach God within this framework. This closeness and connection to God includes coming to know Him experientially, rather than propositionally alone.

In order to attain this experiential communion with God (again, the core of Judaic sanctity), one must act together with Him to actualize the dormant potentiality inherent in many elements of the human experience. When realized by this process of reciprocal sanctification, holiness manifests itself as a blessing in the lives of those who take part in its actualization. Consistently brought to life in this way, holiness works a change in those who participate in that realization, bringing an ethical, personified dimension to Judaic holiness. In this dimension, individuals seek to emulate God's attributes, actions and understanding in a lived process of *imitatio dei.* In this sense, one dimension of Judaic holiness is ontological. While from a Jewish perspective that ontology of holiness is inherently part of God's nature, mankind must endlessly participate in the eternal task of connecting with, drawing closer to and ultimately becoming like God, in order to take part in His sanctity. All of this is intended to lay a foundation for understanding the sacred dimensions of the acts of teaching and learning, which themselves play a central role in the process of sanctification from a Judaic perspective.

## *The Importance of Holiness in Judaism*

Holiness, or *kedusha* (קדושה), is vital to the Jewish religious system. Woven throughout its scriptural tradition[2] in hundreds of passages,[3] holiness not only "occupies the foreground" of the Hebrew Bible,[4] but "takes up over one third of the material" of the *Mishnah*.[5] Its importance is not limited to written scripture, but extends into lived religious experience. In this way, "holiness," wrote Schechter, "is the highest achievement of the Law

[1] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Thought*, 30.
[2] Kahn, *Kodesh, Mishpat and Chessed*, 575.
[3] Müller, H., "קדש *qdš holy," Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 19.
[4] Alan Mittleman, "The Problem of Holiness," *The Journal of Analytic Theology*, Vol. 3 (2015): 36.
[5] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 3.

and its deepest experience as well as the realization of righteousness."[1] This fixation on the importance and centrality of holiness is one of Judaism's key characteristics. For instance, "to the philosophers," wrote Heschel, "the idea of the good was the most exalted idea. To Judaism [however] the idea of the good is penultimate. It cannot exist without the holy. The good is the base; the holy is the summit."[2] When understood in relation to a Jewish conceptualization of God, the place of holiness at Judaism's summit becomes clear.

## *God: The Core and Source of Judaic Holiness*

Within the "core-ring" framework used earlier, from the perspective of the communities involved in this study, the core of Judaic holiness is God. "In every case," wrote Mittleman, "the concept of holiness...is incoherent without the concept of God."[3] It is part of His nature,[4] character[5] and paradigm.[6] His very existence is bound together with the Judaic understanding of holiness.[7] Importantly, this holiness "is not what represents God or symbolizes Him," wrote Shapiro, but is, instead, His very essence.[8] Holiness is so much a part of who God is that it is essentially synonymous with Him. In this sense, "to say that God is *kadosh*," wrote Harvey, "tells us nothing whatsoever about Him,"[9] for holiness is his most fundamental,[10] supreme characteristic[11]—the highest expression[12] and summation[13] of all God's attributes. In short, from these Judaic perspectives, holiness and godliness are, for all intents and purposes, synonymous.

Whereas "all other predicates designate created things primarily and God only by extension, 'holy' designates God primarily and created things only by extension."[14] When God leaves the equation, holiness leaves with Him,[15] for "there is no holiness without God"[16]—no holiness outside the sphere of divinity."[17] Importantly, although mankind takes part in this sanctity by participating in its ritual recognition (through prayer, for instance)[18] and experience,[19] God's holiness is both unique[20] and independent. "I am holy," He states in scripture, "whether you sanctify Me or whether you do not sanctify Me."[21] Unlike many

---

[1] Solomon Schechter, *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1909), 199.
[2] Abraham Heschel, "The Meaning of Observance," in *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives*, ed. Jacob Neusner (Binghamton: Global Publications, 2001), 95.
[3] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 39.
[4] Rabbi Meir Simcha Ha-Kohen of Divinsk, *Meshekh Hokhmah* (Jerusalem, 1974), 504-510.
[5] see David S. Shapiro, "The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism," *Tradition* 7, no. 1 (1965): 48. see also Genesis 20:11; 42:18
[6] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 36.
[7] Rabbi Meir Simcha Ha-Kohen of Divinsk, *Meshekh Hokhmah*, 504-510.
[8] see Shapiro, The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism, 52.
[9] Warren Zev Harvey, "Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei," *Tradition* 16, no. 3 (1977): 10.
[10] Baruch J. Schwatrz, "Israel's Holiness: The Torah Traditions" in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus,* ed. M.J.H.M Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz (Leiden: Brill, 2000).
[11] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 46; see also Lev 19:2 *et passim*; Psalms 99:3, 9
[12] ibid., 58.
[13] ibid., 74; see also Hermann Cohen, *Die Religion der Vernunft,* 2nd edition (Verlag: Köln, 1959), 111.
[14] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 8.
[15] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships,* ed. David Shatz and Joel B. Wolowelsky (Hoboken, New Jersey: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2000).
[16] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 39.
[17] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, "Religious Praxis: The Meaning of *Halakha*" in *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State,* trans. Eliezer Goldman (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1992), 24.
[18] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism,* 51.
[19] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 36.
[20] see Exodus 15:11
[21] *Sifra,* Leviticus 19:2

other conceptualizations of holiness that depict mankind as the originating force behind sanctity, Judaism presses all these "into the service of a loftier idea of God."[1] As such, with Judaic holiness, it is God, not man, who is the originating source of the category of the sacred, imparting "sanctity to Time as He does to Space and to Spirit."[2]

Seeing holiness as simply who God is, each of His attributes and actions are imbued with holiness. These divine attributes in which holiness resides include selflessness, [3] unapproachability,[4] eternity,[5] unity,[6] morality,[7] unchangeability[8] and righteousness.[9] Part of the sanctity of these attributes is that God realizes and embodies them perfectly[10] in a way that is discernible to mankind.[11] Along these same lines, God's actions are also imbued with His holiness. "Even for God," wrote Mittleman, "holiness does not mean a static, inherent property but [what both Cohen and Maimonides described as] a mode of action."[12] In other words, it is not just God's nature that is holy, but His "way" of doing things. Because God's attributes and actions are imbued with His holiness in this way, whenever mankind embodies such attributes or realizes such actions, they connect themselves to God and His holiness. Such connection to God is the primary means by which mankind can participate in, experience and embody holiness, seeing God as not only the core of such holiness, but its source, as well.

## *Holiness as Connection to God*

With God at the core, the remaining dimensions of Judaic holiness derive their sanctity by virtue of their connection to Him. In this sense, "the holiness of human life is derivative" of the more central sanctity which emanates from God.[13] One passage of Jewish scripture compares this relationship to "a man drowning in water to whom the shipmaster threw out a cord, saying, 'Cling to this rope and do not let go of it.'" Similarly, God extends an invitation to His people to fulfill His commandments. By responding to that invitation, like the drowning sailor who connects to the shipmaster with a rope, mankind can connect to God and His holiness.[14] In this sense, mankind is not the source of an entirely elective holiness, but is, instead, "rendered holy by God's effusion of his holiness"[15] upon "those who have achieved the closest relationship" with Him.[16]

With regard to personal behavior and dispositional devotion, "holiness consists in continuous adhesion to the Divine (*devekut*).[17] Apart from people, objects, places, and activities also "derive their sacred character" from the relationship with God that comes about

[1] Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament.* Vol. 1 (London: SCM Press, 1961), 274.
[2] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 47.
[3] ibid., 58.
[4] Exodus 3:2-5; 19:18-22; 24:9-17
[5] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 61.
[6] Theodore Friedman, Baruch Levine and Eliezer Schweid, "Kedushah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition,* ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 12. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 50-56.
[7] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 71.
[8] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "Kedushah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 50-56.
[9] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 71.
[10] ibid., 65.
[11] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Sacred and Profane: *Kodesh* and *Chol* in World Perspectives" in *Gesher* 3, no. 1 (Sivan 5726 – June 1966): 91.
[12] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 42 (speaking specifically of Cohen's view)
[13] ibid., 36.
[14] *Numbers Rabba* 17:6
[15] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 39.
[16] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 58.
[17] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 40.

when they serve Him."[1] The word of God, for instance, is called holy because, having come from God, it "is a sort of extension of Himself," and so endowed with holiness.[2] Any potency that may reside in such things is "not because of some seemingly empirical presence or property" independently inherent in their nature, but simply "because of their relation to God. He owns them."[3] Simply stated, anything that is dedicated to,[4] engaged in the service of,[5] points to,[6] or is simply in relation to[7] God is rendered holy.

Another dimension of this connection to God is in Divine ownership. Whether speaking of a period of time (like the Jewish Sabbath)[8] or a place (like Jerusalem),[9] that which is possessed by God is rendered holy by the relationship that such ownership insinuates. In this sense, *holy* functions somewhat like a possessive adjective such as *mine.*"[10] Such Divine possession is the result of a joint decision and action on the part of both God and man, and so "marks the result of an intentional action more than it names a quasi-physical property."[11] Sacred space functions on the same principle. "Holy land," wrote Harrington, "usually a temple or outdoor shrine, was powerful because it was a location of divine manifestation and was stamped with the seal of divine ownership."[12] Purity also represents holiness only inasmuch as it is "a process of loosening one's ties to the earthy realm and focusing one's gaze on the celestial."[13] In short, through such connections as these, mankind can "bring down the divine presence and holiness into the midst of space and time, into the midst of the finite, earthly existence."[14] Although this illustrates holiness as a cooperative endeavor shared between God and man, in this context, it is God, not man, who is the originating source of sanctity.

From a Judaic perspective, the Durkheimian notion of the sacred as "set-apart" is just another way of connecting to God. Such separateness is part of God's nature, and those who wish to connect with Him must likewise set themselves apart from certain aspects[15] of the world. While attaining holiness requires one's separation from certain relationships,[16] foods,[17] worship[18] and people,[19] that separation is not the purpose of sanctity nor even its defining characteristic. The "distance, separation and distinction"[20] of holiness instead is

---

[1] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "Kedushah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[2] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 159.
[3] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 32.
[4] Louis Jacobs, "Holiness According to Jewish Tradition," *Service International de Documentation Judeo-Chretienne* 30, no. 7 (1997): 18-21.
[5] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "Kedushah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[6] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology,* Vol. 1 (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 216.
[7] Kaufmann Kohler, "Holiness" *in Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906), 439-442.
[8] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 52.
[9] ibid., 57; see also *Pirkei Avot* 6:10
[10] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 36.
[11] ibid., 30.
[12] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 128.
[13] Kenneth Seeskin, "Holiness as an Ethical Ideal," *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 5 (1996): 192.
[14] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man,* trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication. Society, 1983), 41-43.
[15] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 88.
[16] *Sifra, Kedoshim,* Rashi's commentary on Leviticus 19:2
[17] *Mikhlita, Kaspa, Mishpatim,* 2
[18] *Sifra, Kedoshim,* Rashi's commentary on Leviticus 19:2
[19] see Rashi's commentary on Leviticus 20:25-26
[20] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition,* ed. David Schatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Rueven Ziegler (New Jersey: KTAV, 2003): 143-144.

meant to be devoted[1] to the Lord[2] as a means of connecting to Him. In this sense, the "set-apart" dimension of holiness is not so much being set-apart *from* something, but being set-apart *to* something (in this case, God).

While people, places and objects can be connected to God, some are more closely connected than others. "The Creator," wrote Shapiro, "has set apart segments of his universe as specially and uniquely hallowed."[3] Within what have been called "degrees of holiness,"[4] mankind is commanded to draw near to God,[5] whereupon God promises to reciprocate by drawing near to them in return."[6] In this sense, "the goal of self-sanctification is not union *with* God, as the mystics suppose, but nearness *to* God."[7] Such nearness is key to the definition of holiness, and "those who stand in the gap between the divine and the profane are the holiest."[8] In short, not only is holiness derived from a connection to God, but as one draws closer to God within that connection, one's holiness increases in like manner.[9]

## *Holiness as Knowing God*

In the context of this close, personal connection, holiness is also "that which reaches out towards God, and which enables us to know him."[10] This dimension of holiness gives mankind the capacity to understand the otherwise ineffable. It does so by "lifting us above our limited conceptions so that we can comprehend the Lord of the universe, insofar as it is humanly possible."[11] Knowing God in this way is not an "epistemological problem in the Greek sense," but a matter of coming to personally know another being in something akin to Buber's *I-Thou* relationship. Paradoxically, however, this invitation to know God is seen to be nearly impossible,[12] as not only is God's holiness paradoxical,[13] but even seen as "the great mystery at the center of the Jewish religion."[14] Though "remote from all human understanding"[15] and emanating from "the highest of realms,"[16] God and His holiness "can yet be very near to us if the necessary conditions are prepared."[17] However, holiness "can neither be seen nor approached nor controlled"; it can only be experienced[18] in cooperation with deity.

Coming to know God in holiness in this way requires a willingness to change how one sees the world. Holiness, in this sense, does not manifest itself as something altogether

---

[1] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 89.
[2] Jacobs, *Holiness According to Jewish Tradition*, 18-21.
[3] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 46.
[4] Jacobs, *Holiness According to Jewish Tradition*, 18-21; see also Kohler, "Holiness," *in Jewish Encyclopedia,* 439-442.
[5] Eliezer Berkovits, "The Concept of Holiness" in *Essential Essays on Judaism*, ed. David Hazony (Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2002), 281-284.
[6] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 90.
[7] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 199.
[8] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 87.
[9] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 30.
[10] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 52.
[11] ibid.
[12] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "Kedushah," in *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[13] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Shiurei HaRav,* ed. Joseph Epstein (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Pub. House, 1974), 7-8.
[14] Jacobs, *Holiness According to Jewish Tradition,* 18-21.
[15] ibid.
[16] Avraham Wein, "Of Perspective and Paradox: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Analysis of Holiness," *The Jewish Thought Magazine of the Yeshiva University Student Body*, November 2016.
[17] Jacobs, *Holiness According to Jewish Tradition,* 18-21.
[18] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Prayer,* ed. Shalom Carmy (New York: HoRav Foundation, 2003), 66-67.

new, but as something that, though theretofore unseen, was "already there" waiting only to be brought "into focus."[1] This unveiling of the sacred from what Maimonides called the "dark veil that prevents us from apprehending immaterial things as they really are"[2] is brought about by the cooperative, sanctifying acts of both God and man (teaching and learning not least among them). Judaic holiness, then, is seen as an objective reality, its realization contingent upon participation together with an "awareness of the presence of the unseen" which, in the case of Judaism, is God.[3] From a more secular perspective, Cuilanu wrote that, "Only a life lived with full awareness for the divine aspect of humanity and its environment is worthy."[4] In a more Judaic sense, Harvey wrote, "Unaware of the holy, man is a meaningless shadow; aware of it, he is the image of God."[5] Within the context of Judaism, an awareness of the sacred goes hand-in-hand with experiential[6] participation in God's commandments, which are in themselves invitations to take part with Him in His holiness.

## *Holiness as Invitation to Act*

"All words of holiness," says the *Zohar,* "require an invitation."[7] And while that invitation is often a call to action, how that invitation is received, as well as whether it is applied, is "a matter for free but honest choice."[8] From a Jewish perspective, God gives mankind these invitations to holiness-in-action by way of His commandments. By answering this call "through observing God's laws," said Jacobs, "we become holy."[9] Each time God gives one of these invitation-commandments, says the *Talmud,* "he adds to them holiness."[10] So crucial is such practice to the Judaic concept of holiness that responding to God's invitations to act (in other words, His commandments) is synonymous with holiness itself. "There is no difference," wrote Maimonides, "between His saying 'Ye shall be holy' and His having said, 'Do My commandments!"[11] Seeing Judaic holiness as simply "to keep the commandments,"[12] the Talmudic idea that teaching and learning are among the greatest of God's commandments suggests that educative acts are invitations from God to participate in a superlative degree of His holiness. This connection lays a significant foundation for exploring the relationship between Judaic holiness and the acts of teaching and learning in the chapters to follow.

One facet of this participatory dimension of the Judaic sacred is sacrifice. While Soloveitchik wrote that, "sacrifice and holiness are synonymous concepts in Judaism,"[13] such sacrifice is not synonymous with Girard's notion of violence and the sacred. Soloveitchik further clarified Judaic sacrifice when he described holiness as "a passional experience born of bewildering and painful events, of struggle and combat with one's self and

---

[1] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 45.
[2] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 192.
[3] Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed,* 171.
[4] Culianu and Burgdoff, "*sacrilege,*" *in Encyclopedia of Religion,* 8012.
[5] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 15.
[6] Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed*, 66.
[7] (*Zohar* 43a, 192.1, as cited in Shoshana Silberman, *Siddur Shema Yisrael* (New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 1996), 89.
[8] Jacobs, *Holiness According to Jewish Tradition,* 18-21.
[9] ibid.
[10] *Mekhlita, Kaspa, Mishpatim* 2
[11] see Maimonides' commentary on Leviticus 11:44 and 19:2 in *Sefer HaMitzvot*
[12] Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Deuteronomy (Devarim)* (New York: Menorah Publishing Company, 2001); see commentary on Deuteronomy 28:9.
[13] Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed*, 63-64.

others...Holiness is not won easily, at no sacrifice."[1] In this sense, sacrifice is not at the heart of the Judaic sacred, but simply a means whereby one becomes sufficiently sanctified so as to connect to and approach God, the core and source of Judaic sanctity.

The practical, participatory dimension of Judaic holiness is one of its most central attributes. A core dimension of holiness is revealed in "the application of holiness to the life of man,"[2] which endows a "sacred character" upon him and his works.[3] Holiness in this context is not a state of knowledge, but a participatory process—a task[4] "to be pursued in patience and humility daily."[5] With such participatory holiness, "One wants to avoid being a custodian of holiness as a religious legacy; one wants, like Heschel, to be a practitioner."[6] Such sacred practice sanctifies the practitioner, "...closing the gap between disposition and deed"[7] thereby making the contemplative life and the active life become *one* life."[8] This type of sacred practice, however, is not something that can be performed in an instant. These acts must be consistent and continuous, for "holiness requires human maintenance."[9] In a scriptural context, "the Rabbis tend to concentrate on the responsibility and role of the people in the achievement of holiness."[10] In this sense, while God is the core and source of Judaic holiness, the responsibility for the maintenance and perpetuation of a connection to such sanctity is placed squarely on the shoulders of mankind working in tandem with Him.

## *Reciprocal Sanctity*

From this Judaic standpoint, "holiness is reciprocal."[11] God says in the *Midrash,* "I sanctify Israel and they sanctify Me."[12] Yet, "unlike God's holiness, that of Israel is not inherent. It is contingent upon its sanctification through the performance of the commandments."[13] In this sense, "holiness for man is a task, whereas for God it designates being."[14] Although God's holiness is seen as independent and absolute, its actualization still depends "on man's instantiation of it in the world."[15]

In one Talmudic passage, Rav Pinkhas proposes what is sometimes called the "ladder of virtues" with holiness at the top.[16] In light of this passage, wrote Mittleman, "holiness is exceptional. Unlike the other traits, which may be acquired through focused, disciplined, and constant human intention and action, holiness requires the cooperation of the divine."[17] Judaic holiness, then, is not just a call to action, but a "call to cooperate with God in bringing

---

[1] Soloveitchik, *Family Redeemed*, 74.
[2] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 48.
[3] ibid., 56.
[4] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 42.
[5] ibid., 43, specifically illustrating Cohen's perspective
[6] ibid., 36.
[7] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 201.
[8] Lawrence Kaplan, "I Sleep, but My Heart Waketh: Maimonides' Conception of Human Perfection" in *The Thought of Moses Maimonides*, ed. Ira Robinson, Lawrence Kaplan and Julien Bauer (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1990), 148.
[9] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 42
[10] ibid., 201.
[11] ibid., 43.
[12] *Genesis Rabbah* 15:24; "I sanctify Israel, and they sanctify Me."
[13] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "*Kedushah," in Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[14] Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism,* trans. Simon Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 96.
[15] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 42, specifically illustrating Cohen's perspective
[16] *B. Avodah Zarah* 20b.
[17] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 40.

about the triumph of His will,"[1] originating "not in what a man does, but in the fact that he does it in fulfilling the divine intention."[2] While it requires "a conscious act of man"[3] in order to "be created,"[4] holiness is more than a human act alone, but "an act of consecration...persisting in relation to God."[5] In short, holiness simply "cannot be acquired through human effort alone. An active, agentive divine movement is necessary."[6] In the Judaic context, this "active, agentive divine movement" is the personal, efficacious and discernible intervention of God in human acts of holiness.

As "a partnership between God and man,"[7] "holiness is two-fold."[8] "Its beginning is labor and its end reward," wrote Luzzatto. "Its beginning is exertion and its end, a gift. That is, it begins with one's sanctifying himself and ends with his being sanctified"[9] By "constantly directing their will toward the sanctification of action," wrote Mittleman, "God may let his holiness descend and dwell upon them.[10] Seen in this light, Judaic holiness is "not a one-way street" but "a two-way process by which the Holy One comes into the midst of his faithful worshipper...as a partner in holiness."[11]

Through a combination of "divine election and human responsibility," God is believed to choose His people, and in return, "as his agents they must reflect his holiness."[12] And while in this relationship mankind remains entirely dependent upon God, as He can "never be brought under human control," those who unite with God in holiness become strong in "the state of their communion with divine power."[13] In other words, from this Jewish perspective, human action oriented to the sacred has no power on its own. Whatever efficacious power may arise from such acts comes about because "the sanctity of man's deeds invokes God's aid."[14] In sum, while holiness emanates from God as its source, its realization is a process of cooperative, volitional action between God and man working together as participatory agents.[15]

## *Holiness as Actualized Potentiality*

*Chassidic* tradition maintains that when God created the world he placed "sparks of holiness[16] throughout the vast expanses of creation."[17] These sparks do not constitute holiness in a fully realized state, but are only "intimations"[18] or "potentialities of holiness."[19] Within this framework, "it is up to man to enable the hallowed phases of reality to achieve their

---

[1] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 64.
[2] Berkovits, *The Concept of Holiness*, 281-284.
[3] Abraham Heschel, *The Sabbath* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), 79.
[4] Wein, *Of Perspective and Paradox*.
[5] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 79.
[6] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 41.
[7] Wein, *Of Perspective and Paradox*.
[8] Moshe Chavim Luzzatto, *The Path of the Just,* trans. Shagra Silverstein (New York: Feldheim, 1990), 13.
[9] ibid.
[10] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 40; see also Luzzatto, *Path of the Just,* 327.
[11] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 88.
[12] ibid., 200.
[13] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 40; see also Luzzatto, *Path of the Just,* 334.
[14] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "*Kedushah," in Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56; see also Leviticus *Rabba* 24:4
[15] Stephen Yanchar, "Participational Agency," *Review of General Psychology* 15, no. 3 (2011): 277.
[16] see Gershom G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing, 1941), 264.
[17] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 46.
[18] Jacobs, *Holiness According to Jewish Tradition,* 18-21.
[19] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 67; see also *Mekhilta* to Ex. 20:8

holiness in full."[1] In other words, "it is man's duty to confirm and fulfill that which God has sanctified."[2] For example, while the Jewish creation narrative maintains that God "sanctified the Sabbath at the very beginning,"[3] it is the duty of mankind to convert the potentiality of holiness inherent in that day into a "holiness fully realized."[4] In this sense, holiness is an "endowed"[5] quality—a combination of "the significance that man, by his thoughts and actions, ascribes" to it[6] along with the sacred potentiality God is believed to have given it in the moment of its creation.

While this principle applies to the sanctification of things,[7] it applies in equal measure to personified sanctification. "Man is not intrinsically holy," said Leibowitz. "His holiness is not already existing and realized in him. It is rather incumbent upon him to achieve it."[8] This principle whereby God endows an inherent, though dormant potentiality in all creation, then gives mankind the responsibility to actualize that sanctity, is one of the core principles of a Judaic understanding of holiness. "The dream of creation," wrote Soloveitchik, "finds its resolution in the actualization of the principle of holiness."[9] In sum, holiness as actualized potentiality is just another facet of reciprocal sanctity whereby holiness is realized in a joint effort shared between God and man.

While "nothing is sacred but man literally makes it so,"[10] "true, complete, and fulfilled holiness emerges" not as the independent action of man, contingent only upon the whims of an unfettered fancy, but instead "as the product of the interaction between God Who hallows and man who actualizes the unrealized possibilities of holiness."[11] These unrealized possibilities are where "blessing and sanctity [are] joined together."[12] Not only do such unrealized possibilities have the capacity to endow sacred acts with power,[13] but they can also sanctify those who realize such acts. They do so by engulfing them in "a living spiritual power flowing from God."[14] In other words, "Those who keep holy the things that are holy," wrote Heschel, "shall themselves become holy."[15] This changes holiness from a "task" to a process of "becoming"[16] whose ultimate purpose is that man might become like God.

---

[1] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 67.
[2] ibid.
[3] see Genesis 2:3
[4] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 67; see also *Mekhilta* to Ex. 20:8
[5] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 32.
[6] Eliezer Schweid, *The Land of Israel: National Home or Land of Destiny*, trans. Deborah Greniman (London: Associated University Press, 1985), 62-63.
[7] Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 47.
[8] Yeshayahu Leibowitz, "The Reading of Shema," in *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*, trans. Eliezer Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 46.
[9] Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 108-109.
[10] Aaron Lichtenstein, "Joseph Soloveitchik," in *Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century,* ed. Simon Noveck (Clinton, Massachusetts: B'nai B'rith Department of Adult Jewish Education, 1963), 282-285.
[11] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 68.
[12] ibid., 62.
[13] see Jeremiah 23:9; Psalms 105:42
[14] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "*Kedushah" in Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[15] Heschel, as cited in Robert Abramson, "Kedushah: One Focus in the Vision of Our Day Schools," *The Melton Journal* (1990): 32.
[16] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 42, explaining Cohen's view

# *Holiness as Imitatio Dei*

"In Judaism," wrote Seeskin, "we are commended not only to do what God says but, in a deeper sense, to walk in God's ways.[1] According to a standard interpretation of this commandment," he continued, "to walk in the ways of God means to perform actions like those God performs."[2] However, interpreting the Levitical verse, "Ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy,"[3] Abba Saul simply wrote, "The King has a retinue. What must it do? *Imitate* the King!"[4] Maimonides agreed, saying that, "A man who has attained the highest degree of sanctification...imitates God."[5] Yet, though this process includes imitating God's ways, such imitation is more than mimicking God's actions.[6] "This commandment," wrote Seeskin, "has been taken to mean that Israel must not only perform certain actions but perform them *in order to become like God.*"[7] For "if a man is an image of God," wrote Harvey, "presumably he has the capability to imitate Him."[8] And if he is commanded by a being who presumably cannot lie to not just "do holy things" but to "be holy even as God is holy,"[9] Seeskin reasons, "it must be possible for us to become so."[10]

Becoming like God brings an ethical dimension to Judaic holiness. "Since holiness is conceived as the very essence of God, Biblical religion...incorporates moral perfection as an essential aspect of holiness, though by no means its total content."[11] "God is holy," wrote Cohen, "because the ideal of ethics is inherent in Him."[12] As an element of who God is, "holiness means morality"[13] and is "basically an ethical value."[14] In this sense, "To 'love your fellow as yourself'[15] is as much a demand of holiness, as is the avoidance of eating anything 'with its blood'."[16] Such goodness, wrote Harrington, "is characteristic of holiness."[17] "This ethics," she continued, "is in direct imitation of the Holy One; it is an extension of his holiness into the human realm."[18] Yet, whether in its ritual or moral dimensions, imitating God serves a more fundamental purpose than these, namely, that man might become like God.

"The utmost virtue of man," said Maimonides, "is to become like unto Him, may he be exalted, as far as he is able...as the Sages made clear when interpreting the verse, *Ye shall be holy.*"[19] For Philo, "holiness or human perfection...is imitation of God's perfection. Humans must understand that 'attaining a likeness to God who made them' is 'the proper end

---

[1] see Deuteronomy 10:12, 28:9
[2] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 192.
[3] see Leviticus 19:2
[4] *Sifra, Kedoshim, ad* Leviticus 19:2; *Yalkut Shimoni,* Leviticus 604.
[5] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "*Kedushah," in Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[6] Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart,* 66-67.
[7] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 191.
[8] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 7.
[9] see Leviticus 19:2
[10] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 196.
[11] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "*Kedushah," in Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[12] ibid., 50-56; see also Cohen, *Die Religion der Vernunft,* 116-129.
[13] Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 42, speaking of Cohen's view
[14] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 62.
[15] see Leviticus 19:18
[16] see Leviticus 19:26; see also Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness*, 38.
[17] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 44.
[18] ibid., 200.
[19] Moses Maimonides*, The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. by Shlomo Pines (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 1:54.

of their existence.'"[1] Yet, however like God one may become by virtue of His holiness, "this movement towards perfection," wrote Decock, "is [still] the fruit of total dependence on God."[2] As such, "whatever holiness man attains," wrote Shapiro, "is at best a dim reflection of divine holiness."[3] In short, the purpose of Judaic holiness is that mankind become so closely tethered to God, the source of holiness, that they not only imitate him, but become like Him. And although Jewish scripture suggests that *being* coequal with God is unattainable, it repeats again and again the call to participate in holiness as an eternal process of *becoming* like Him.

## *Holiness as Eternal Purpose*

Because God is believed to be perfect, and holiness synonymous with Him, the task to become like Him is "eternal. It can never be fulfilled except through a never-ending effort."[4] As such, holiness is not so much a static state of being, but an eternal process of becoming.[5] Yet, this is not some Semitic version of Sisyphus, "where each step, though closer to perfection, brings with it the guarantee of failure"[6] because its end goal is inherently unattainable. It is, instead, "obligatory precisely because it *is* within our power to fulfill it"[7] in an endless iteration of present moments which, when lived in this way and with this eternal, sanctifying intent, become themselves "eternity in disguise."[8] So "freed from the temporal and transient,"[9] one can pursue holiness in "every moment"[10] without becoming preoccupied with outcomes or end goals. Because "the process of drawing near to God is infinite,"[11] "the task itself is the goal."[12]

Inasmuch as sacred acts are pursued with this eternal perspective and purpose in mind, "intentionally directed to God"[13] rather than a "lust for self-perfection,"[14] they are sanctified by God, and holiness is present."[15] Such purity of intent and eternal perspective are among the key factors in deciding whether any act becomes connected to God, and so made sacred by virtue of that connection.[16] This is crucial to understanding the role of Judaic holiness in Jewish education. When teaching and learning are considered in light of the sacred, they are placed within the realm of the eternal. As such, they, like other acts considered in this light, are perhaps defined not so much by their outcomes, but by the process of their fulfilment.

[1] Paul Decock, "Philo of Alexandria: Holiness as Self-Possession and Self-Transcendence," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4, (2016), 6.
[2] ibid.
[3] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 58.
[4] Leibowitz, *The Reading of Shema,* 46.
[5] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 200; see also Cohen, *Religion of Reason,* 204.
[6] ibid., 201.
[7] ibid., 203.
[8] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 16.
[9] Friedman, Levine and Schweid, "*Kedushah," in Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 50-56.
[10] Seeskin, *Holiness as an Ethical Ideal*, 202; see also Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 205.
[11] ibid.,199.
[12] Cohen, *Religion of Reason,* 205.
[13] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 89.
[14] Abraham Yitzhak Kook, *Olat Rayah* (Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1963), 282.
[15] Jacobs, *Holiness According to Jewish Tradition,* 18-21.
[16] ibid.

## *Summary*

While Judaic holiness has many dimensions, God is believed to be at its core. All of its peripheral characteristics are seen to be made holy by virtue of their connection to God as the source of Judaic holiness. Because of a Judaic understanding of God as a participatory agent, the realization of holiness is seen as a process whereby God and man act together to realize the dormant potentiality of holiness in the universe. This cooperative action includes connecting oneself to God by coming to know Him personally, working with Him, and answering His call to obey His commandments. When the dormant potentiality of holiness is realized through such cooperative action, acts, places, objects and times are believed to be made sacred. But more importantly, by imitating God's ways, mankind can be changed to become like Him. This process is an eternal one, requiring constant and consistent action on the part of mankind to act in holiness so that, by virtue of the connection to God created thereby, one might share in God's holiness, become like Him and begin to see and understand the world as He does.

# Teaching, Learning and the Sacred

The relationship between the sacred and educative practice has been addressed in a variety of academic literatures. Prominent threads in moral education, for instance, tend to use the term "sacred" as a synonym for "inviolable"[1] and "unalterable."[2] They describe, for example, human beings as "the sacred thing par excellence"[3] or "the sacred character" of moral education.[4] All in all, however, the terms "sacred" and "holy" play a relatively insignificant role in moral education.[5] While some authors in ethics education occasionally refer to an "awareness of the sacred,"[6] much like moral education, the field makes infrequent use of "sacred" as a term.

Rudge, for instance, described holistic education as "a view that regards every life in the universe as sacred."[7] In this context, the sacred is seen as a generic, axiological orientation toward the value of all life. Because this conceptualization is so broad, holistic education as a field has not explored the effects of the sacred specifically on educative practice. Spirituality in education has often used the terms "sacred" and "spirituality" interchangeably.[8] Considering O'Reilley's view that the term "spirituality" in this field can mean "anything you want it to mean,"[9] the definition of the sacred in this context can be so

---

[1] Émile Durkheim, *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961), 175.

[2] Richard Stanley Peters, *Moral Development and Moral Education* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 12.

[3] Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 107.

[4] ibid., 10.

[5] For example, in the recent *Handbook of Moral and Character Education,* the term "sacred" only appeared once in a single footnote, while "holy" did not appear at all

[6] Lisa La Jevic and Stephanie Springgay, "A/r/tography as an ethics of embodiment: Visual journals in preservice education," *Qualitative inquiry* 14, no. 1 (2008): 67-89.

[7] Lucila Telles Rudge, "Holistic Education: An Analysis of its Pedagogical Application" (doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 2008), 75; Ron Miller, "Introduction: Vital Voices of Educational Dissent" in *The Renewal of Meaning in Education: Responses to the Cultural and Ecological Crisis of our Times* (Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press, 1993), 20; Rudolf Steiner, *Universe, Earth and Man: In Their Relationship to Egyptian Myths and Modern Civilization: Eleven Lectures Given in Stuttgart Between 4 and 16 August 1908* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1987).

[8] Joan Montgomery Halford, "Longing for the Sacred in Schools: A Conversation with Nel Noddings," *Educational Leadership* 56, no. 4 (December 1998/Jan 1999): 28-32.

[9] Mary Rose O'Reilley, *The Peaceable Classroom* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1993),72.

broad as to run the risk of losing its explanatory power. Other perspectives in this field, such as Glazer's "practice of wholeness and awareness"[1] or Palmer's "that which is worthy of respect,"[2] have offered more straightforward definitions of the sacred. However, while these insights have valuable implications for educative practice, they are focused on a universal definition of the sacred based on personal experience[3] rather than a deep engagement with an understanding of the sacred in a specific content.

Religiously-informed education speaks of the role of the sacred in various religious traditions. Apart from the direct references to teaching and learning as sacred acts in the Jewish tradition mentioned earlier, threads of Islam[4] and Christianity[5] refer to the sacred dimensions of a religiously-informed approach to education generally. Some of these insights, however, are more oriented toward general philosophical principles than educative practices, such as the Islamic notion regarding "the inseparable nature of knowledge and the sacred"[6] or the relationship between the Christian conceptualization of the Holy Spirit and the educative process broadly conceived.[7] While these fields address aspects of the relationship between the sacred and teaching and learning practices, this thesis seeks to explore the dynamics of this relationship more deeply, investigating purportedly sacred educative practices in situated, lived experience. Jewish conceptualizations of this relationship offer fertile ground for such an investigation.

## Teaching, Learning and Judaic Holiness

The notion that Jewish teaching and learning are closely related to Judaic holiness appears in Jewish scripture as well as scholarship in Jewish studies. However, because such ideas are so closely linked to the participatory, personified and experiential dimensions of sanctity, the majority of literature outlining the sacred properties of Jewish teaching and learning is not included here. Instead, it is woven throughout the narratives and analyses of the chapters that follow. Appearing in this way amidst the lived experiences of those who approach teaching and learning in light of the sacred, this scriptural and academic literature illustrate the sacred-education relationship more organically. This not only mirrors the ethnographic process by which these themes revealed themselves in the course of research, but provides a richness and depth to the findings that, were the literature explained in isolation, might be lost. For this reason, the following section introduces certain foundational elements to the relationship between Judaic holiness and Jewish teaching and learning practices. It does so to give the reader a preliminary taste of the more in-depth, contextual narratives and analyses to come.

In much the same way as He participates with mankind in sacred practices more generally, God is believed to be personally involved in sanctified educative acts. "If three have eaten at a table and have spoken there words of Torah," says the Talmud, "it is as if they had eaten at the table of the All-present."[8] Because of this belief that God attends sanctified educative acts and pedagogic encounters, the "study of the Torah was considered holy

[1] Steven Glazer, "Sacredness: The Ground of Learning" in *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education,* ed. Steven Glazer (New York: Penguin, 1999), 11-12.
[2] Palmer, *The Grace of Great Things*, 20.
[3] ibid.
[4] A'ishah Ahmad Sabki and Glenn Hardaker, "The madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy," *Educational Review* 65, no. 3 (2013): 344.
[5] Carol Lakey Hess, "Educating in the Spirit," *Religious Education* 86, no. 3 (1991): 383-398.
[6] Sabki and Hardaker, *The madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy*, 344.
[7] Hess, *Educating in the Spirit*, 383-398.
[8] *Pirkei Avot* 3:3

worship."[1] For this reason, when a period of study is concluded, said Shapiro, a prayer is recited "because the sanctification of God's Name is the goal of our studies."[2] This is exemplary of the reciprocal dimension of Judaic holiness, whereby man sanctifies the name of God, and in return God sanctifies man and his deeds. This was among the primary reasons for which Torah (Teaching) had been given to the Jewish people. "The Torah was given," says the *Mishnah*, "so that through it the Name of God would be sanctified."[3]

Teaching and learning also exhibit characteristics of *imitatio dei,* another of the crucial dimensions of Judaic holiness. "The transmission of holy word from mentor to disciple," wrote Harrington, "was a holy process which imitated the holy transmission of God's word to Moses."[4] Such mentors and their disciples had to be pure in order to take part in this sacred process, as it could only be imparted "from one pure vessel to another."[5] Though this purity is not the heart of the educative dimension of Judaic holiness, it is a necessary condition preparatory to approaching God through the educative process itself. Importantly, although the sanctity of the Jewish educative endeavor is spiritual and deeply experiential, it is also "mediated through the mental faculties, not in spite of them."[6] In both its intellectual and spiritual facets, "the transmission of holiness" through teaching and learning is "a dynamic process" whose "holiness is a powerful, mystical force which is transmitted and received many times over." Because God is the source of its sanctity, the act of teaching and learning is a partnership wherein mankind works in tandem with God. As they engage with God and His holiness, those who teach and learn in this way (i.e., in light of the sacred) "participate in the holy" and also become holy themselves.[7]

Even from this short, foundational overview of both Jewish scripture as well as Jewish studies in general, the relationship between educative acts and holiness appears rich, strong and dynamic. However, while scholars like Harrington have made brief mention of the sacred dimensions of Jewish teaching and learning from a theoretical standpoint, these principles have not been illustrated in context, situated in the lived experience of those who attempt not just to talk about them, but to realize them in daily educative practice. To do so is among the primary purposes of this thesis, as well as one of its major contributions. By investigating these theoretical dimensions of the sacred-education relationship in tandem with rich, thick description of lived experience in communities that attempt to realize such theories, this thesis gives an unprecedentedly in-depth look into the nature and dynamics of Jewish teaching and learning when considered and realized in light of the sacred.

## Summary

To conclude this chapter, I return to the Jamesian assumptions with which it began. Even to those not of Jewish faith,[8] exploring the dimensions of the relationship between the sacred and teaching and learning practices can be of significant benefit.[9] While readers may not share the specific theistic assumptions espoused by the communities explored hereafter, experiencing the unique "meaning and power that perceptions of the sacred hold in peoples'

---

[1] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 143.
[2] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 69.
[3] *Tanna-debe-Eliyahu,* Chap. 18
[4] Harrington, *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism*, 160.
[5] ibid.
[6] ibid.
[7] ibid.
[8] James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.
[9] James, *Pragmatism*.

lives"[1] can bring added insight, appreciation and understanding not only of other approaches to education, but to one's own, as well. Lamenting their inability to include it in their teaching and learning,[2] many educators "long for the sacred."[3] While keeping open the possibility of seeing education in what Rav Steinsaltz called "a non-rectangular way," I again invite the reader to learn with the Jewish communities in the chapters that follow—to sing, dance, pray, study and struggle with them. Combining this Geertzian "deep hanging out" with the academic and Jewish descriptions of holiness heretofore outlined, the following chapters make room for unique insights and fresh perspectives for sacred dimensions of teaching and learning in this context and for educative practice in general.

[1] Pargament et al., *Some Contributions of a Psychological Approach to the Study of the Sacred*, 733.
[2] Richards, *The Secularization of the Academic Worldview*, 1982.
[3] Noddings, quoted in Halford, "Longing for the Sacred in Schools: A Conversation with Nel Noddings."

# CHAPTER THREE: METHOD

*R. Judah said in the name of Samuel: What is meant by "Thou makest men as the fish of the sea?"*[1] *In what way can men be spoken of as being like fish of the sea? In this way: as a fish of the sea, once they go up on dry land, promptly die. So human beings, as soon as they give up Torah and its precepts, promptly perish.*[2]

Talmudic Sages tell of a man named Akiva who rose from his humble beginnings as a shepherd to become one of the greatest Torah scholars of antiquity. When Roman conquerors forbade their Jewish subjects from teaching their beliefs in public, Rabbi Akiva defied them and taught Torah boldly in their streets. Fearful of Roman retribution, his followers begged him to stop. In answer, the great Rav told them a story.

"There once was a fish," he said, "who caught the eye of a fisherman. As the fish evaded the man's most cunning trickery, a fox approached the water's edge and, seeing the commotion, asked, 'Why don't you come and hide in my cave, fish? That way,' he said, 'the fisherman won't find you.' The wise old fish, without too much thought, answered, 'I cannot do what you ask. For if in the water, which is essential to my life, I am already in danger, how much more so will I be if I leave it?'" The very act of teaching Torah, of living and even embodying it, was more than just an *act* in Judaism at that time. It was to them, and still is today, the source and means by, from and through which life derived its meaning, and just as essential to Akiva as water was to that fish.

When scholars describe Judaism as orthopractic, it is precisely this characteristic that they are trying to describe. Judaism encompasses and informs nearly every aspect of the human experience. This pervasiveness often makes it difficult for Jews to articulate the principles which generations of daily practice have made tacit. This includes ideas about holiness, teaching, learning and, naturally, the relationship between them. At the outset of my time in Jerusalem, it appeared that I would have more luck interviewing Rabbi Akiva's fish about the nature of water than I would understanding Judaic holiness, teaching or learning from interviews and readings alone.

The best course of action, it seemed, was to become as closely involved in a Jewish learning community as possible on a participatory level. Through focused observations, in-depth interviews,[3] active participation[4] and meticulous note taking,[5] in short, an ethnographic process, I could begin to paint a more complete picture of Judaic teaching, learning and holiness, so as to shed further light on the dynamics of their relationship. My goal "to understand and be attentive to the feelings of another on their terms"[6] closely reflected Spradley's intent when he stated,

> I want to understand the world from your point of view...to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?"[7]

---

[1] Habakuk 1:14

[2] B. AZ 3a.

[3] Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann, *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing,* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2009).

[4] Patricia Adler and Peter Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1987); Russel Bernard, *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1988); David Fetterman, *Ethnography: Step-by-step* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2010); D. Jorgensen, *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1989).

[5] Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

[6] David Mills and Missy Morton. *Ethnography in Education*. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 2013), 4.

[7] James Spradley. *The Ethnographic Interview* (Belmont, California: Waveland Press, 2016), 34.

If I was going to understand anything from an authentically Jewish perspective, let alone the complexities of the relationship between holiness and education, I would need to go where it was happening and observe these principles in action, rather than rely on secondary textual analysis alone. And Jerusalem, both a world center of Torah education and Judaism's holiest city, was an ideal place to start.

Judaism's Talmudic Sages say that if a man reads but does not participate in *Torah sheBa'al Peh* (תורה שבעל פה), or Oral Torah, he will stand forever outside its inner mysteries. And, in like manner, if he participates in *Torah sheBa'al Peh* (תורה שבעל פה) at the expense of reading, he will also find himself outside that inner circle.[1] From this perspective, a complete understanding of Torah is built upon both its written and oral dimensions. In the context of this thesis, a deep and thorough understanding of sacred Jewish texts only enriches the ethnographic process.

These principles of practical application and textual immersion are not opposed to one another. They are, instead, dual pillars of the same orthopractic goal. The vast majority of sacred Jewish texts are not the isolated works of single authors, but are comprised of dialogues and lively arguments, riddled with the imperfections characteristic of the human dialogic process. Even the names of these texts imply action and practice. *Torah* (תורה) can be translated as 'teaching'; the names of the *Gemara* (גמרה) and *Midrash* (מדרש) signify the method of their study and, perhaps most important of all, the tradition itself is called *Torah sheBa'al Peh* (תורה שבעל פה), literally "Torah that is upon the mouth." The present day perpetuation of this tradition does not rely upon the writing of new texts, but in speaking, acting and embodying it. While textual analysis alone would not provide a complete picture of the sacred-education relationship, a uniquely observational one bereft of scriptural context would be equally incomplete. As such, my method calls upon both.

## Text

Familiarizing myself with sacred Jewish texts was a key part of my method. Before I went to Jerusalem, I had already begun to study ancient and modern Hebrew, reading relevant portions of the Hebrew Bible, or *Tanakh* (תנ"ך). But because I lacked the guidance that I later received as I studied in *yeshiva* with rabbis and their disciples, my preliminary exposure to sacred Jewish texts (e.g., *Mishnah* (משנה)*, Talmud Bavli* (תלמוד בבלי)*, Tanya* (תניא), etc.) was only through secondary sources. Such sources were most often written about a single topic or theme pulling relevant quotes from Jewish scriptural texts to support their claims. Although this was a good first step to orient myself to this literature, especially as I looked for information on Jewish education and holiness in particular, these secondary sources only gave me a surface-level understanding of Jewish texts relevant to my topic. This cursory understanding would later prove insufficient.

Once I had begun my fieldwork, I quickly realized that this kind of cursory exposure to Hebrew scripture had only scratched the surface, and that a vast ocean of text awaited me. When I arrived at my first yeshiva, I catalogued its libraries to get a sense of the literature we were reading. As I went through room after room whose walls were filled with books from floor to ceiling, I wrote out long lists of titles that I had never heard of and quickly became overwhelmed. Recruiting the help of one of my classmates, we began to go through the titles together one by one. After I had written about a page, he stopped and said, "If you really want to see how much literature we have to work with, you should go to Manny's." He gave me directions to a street only a few minutes' walk from where we were, which I followed

[1] Leviticus *Rabbah* 3:7

immediately. Before long, cautiously meandering through *Mea She'arim*, one of Jerusalem's most ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods, I found it and, walking in, stared wide-eyed in amazement. Arrayed before me was a miniature city whose streets, buildings and gardens were all overflowing with rows, stacks and piles of books.

The sea of literature into which I had stepped at the yeshiva now seemed only a drop in the vast ocean of tomes spread before me. And, walking up and down those endless corridors, brushing my fingertips reverently across the gilded letters etched upon the leather spines of endless volumes, my wonder gave way to apprehension. "How would I be able to read all of this?" I thought. But neither the content nor its memorization, I later discovered, was the point of these volumes. Rather, the purpose was, much like with Rabbi Akiva's fish, to be immersed in the texts in order to think like the Sages by whom they had been written. Of the balance needed when reading from Judaism's sacred texts, the Talmud states:

> The Torah is all fire. It was given out of fire and it is like fire. What is the way of fire? When a man comes too close to it, he is scorched; when too far from it, he is chilled. So, too, a man should make certain that he is no more than warmed by the fire of the Sages.[1]

Being continually warmed and informed by the light of these sacred texts in turn shed light on my research questions. This fire of Torah, however, which had such potential to illuminate my research, was to be uniquely found in Judaism's primary source texts, rather than the secondary ones I had been perusing before my arrival in Jerusalem.

From this perspective, instead of warming and illuminating me by the light and warmth of Torah's blaze, secondary sources alone would have left me chilled and in the dark. Such sources often only partially cited the primary source passages to which they referred. This partial citation style removed primary texts from the richness of their context and so they lost some of their more nuanced meaning, both historically and linguistically. Furthermore, these citations were most often of English translations of the primary works in question, whose interpretations were not always accurate. Most often, such losses of meaning were not the result of blatant mistranslation. They were, instead, the result of the incongruity of a word-for-word translation between English and the Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish in which most Jewish primary sources were written.

For example, later on in the section entitled 'Storytelling' I cite a passage about how a teacher can place handles on a basket of fruit that symbolizes Torah knowledge, so that those who have ears to hear might 'lift it' and understand the word of God. The English translation of this passage seems straightforward. In the original Aramaic, however, it is much more subtle. In this passage, the Hebrew word for "handle," *ozen* (אזן), is the same as the word for 'ear.' This play on words in the Hebrew passage gives us the sense that a teacher's role is to give his disciples the very 'ears to hear' that this passage calls for. In the English text, the subtlety of this message is almost entirely lost.

Yet, immersing myself in the texts alone, even primary source texts in their original languages, was still insufficient. Delving too deeply into such texts would, according to the passage above, leave me scorched, rather than warmed by the light of Torah's fire. According to Jewish tradition, another outsider faced the same dilemma two thousand years earlier. Wanting to immerse himself in the original texts of Torah without understanding the balance between Written and Oral Torah so fundamental to Jewish orthopraxy, two great Sages, Hillel and Shammai, taught him otherwise.

> A certain heathen once came before Shammai and asked him, "How many Torahs have you?" "Two," he replied, "the Written Torah and the Oral Torah." "I will believe you about the Written Torah, but not about the Oral Torah. Take me as a proselyte, on condition that you teach me only the Written

[1] *Tanhuma, Yitro*, §12

> Torah." In response, Shammai scolded him and angrily ordered him to get out. When he went before Hillel, the latter accepted him as a proselyte. On the first day he taught him the letters of the alphabet in order: *Alef, bet, gimmel, dalet* [and so on to *tav*]. The following day he reversed the order of the letters. "But yesterday you did not teach them to me in this order," the heathen protested. "Is it not upon me," Hillel asked, "that you have to rely to know the correct order of letters in the alphabet? Then in the Oral Torah you must also rely upon me.[1]

Just as that millennia-old outsider could not learn the text of Torah without the help of one who embodied its teachings, so, too, did I rely on the help of those who embodied them in my day. In order to supplement my immersion in these communities' sacred texts, I had to also rely upon what living members of that same millennia-old community were willing to tell me. It was for this reason that I chose to conduct as many interviews as I could with both rabbis and their disciples that I might learn not only from that which was written, but from those who lived and embodied those writings. Such dual immersion was crucial to my method.

## Interviews

Just as Hillel and Shammai had spoken with the proselyte in the previous section, speaking with others was both useful for me as a researcher and a fundamental part of a Judaic approach to education. Even after I had improved my Hebrew and learned more Aramaic and Yiddish, understanding the significance of what I read was still challenging. Yet, I found that I was not alone in my predicament. Not only did other members of the *yeshiva* struggle to uncover the deeper meanings believed to be behind such passages, but many of their ancestors did, as well. The following *mashal* (משל), or parable, speaks of this struggle and the source to which one is to look for aid in the Jewish tradition:

> Rabbi Khanina said, 'There was a deep well full of cold, sweet water, but no one could drink from it. A man came and, knotting rope to rope and cord to cord, drew from the well and drank. Then all began to draw and drink, as well. In this way, from saying to saying and parable to parable, he discerned the completeness of Torah's secret.'[2]

Together with my peers at *yeshiva,* I often felt like those who had gathered around that well in hopes of drinking from its depths. But no matter how hard we studied, we still seemed unable to draw any water for ourselves—unable, that is, until we spoke with a rabbi. Knitting together explanation after explanation, example by example, he would carefully weave the means by which we could, like him, drink from Torah's waters.

But beyond the perplexity that I shared with those who had become my learning brethren, I stood alone beside another well whose depths, again, I could not reach on my own. At the bottom of this well lay the answers to my research questions about sacred teaching and learning, and the only ones who could weave the means to plumb these answers from its depths were the *yeshiva's* rabbis and disciples. My original plan had been to use phenomenological[3] and ethnographic[4] approaches to conduct two semi-structured, conversational interviews[5] with three teachers and five students at each yeshiva. I had hoped

---

[1] *Talmud Bavli, B. Shab.* 31a.
[2] Song of Songs *Rabbah*, 1:9
[3] Amedeo Giorgi and Barbro Giorgi, "The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method" in *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design*, ed. Paul Camic, Jean Rhodes and Lucy Yardley (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2003), 243-273.
[4] Mills and Morton, *Ethnography in Education*.
[5] Steiner Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996).

to use these interviews to create, as co-researcher with participants,[1] ethnographic portraits and vignettes[2] for a deep, authentic portrayal of their emic perspectives.

But, from their perspective, I who stood helpless by that well could not in good conscience tell them how or when to weave the rope that would quench my thirst for understanding. In other words, I was not in charge of when, where or how many interviews would take place. These men believed they were charged by God with a divine urgency that pervaded their every moment.[3] Were I to distract from that divine quest to teach and learn, not only would God's presence depart from them,[4] said the Talmud, but "unsightly afflictions" would plague "the depths of their being."[5] As such, any moment they gave me was seen as gift. Such urgency to be constantly involved in Torah study made first interviews generous, but second interviews nearly impossible. And although this pattern held true in nearly all cases, each yeshiva had a distinct attitude regarding interviews that required constant adaptation.

Interviews with rabbis differed from those with students. Overall, Rabbis were much more hesitant about speaking with me, wanting first to know all about who I was, why I had chosen to study in their *yeshiva* and what I intended to do with the information they would give me. On the other hand, students tended to be much more curious about me and open to sharing about themselves in the course of our interactions. This difference between primarily cautious rabbis and open, curious students held true from across these communities.

My first interview at *Merkaz David*, for example, was with Rav Katz. When we first met, we discovered that we had both come from a family of dentists, and were soon on very friendly terms. Naturally, he was the first person I approached about doing an interview, and although he was generous with his time in the first instance, despite our being on friendly terms, he was often rushing about whenever I approached him for another. As it seemed unwise to overburden their time and generosity, I changed my method so as to fit all my questions into a single, longer interview. Overall, rabbis at *Merkaz David* were the most willing to grant me interviews, and more often than not did so quite cheerfully, showing a great deal of trust and openness in sharing their thoughts. Rabbis at *Or Akiva*, however, tended to be more hesitant about speaking with me. The Lithuanian tradition they favored tended to err on the side of caution when interacting with outsiders visiting their communities. Yet, students at *Or Akiva* tended to be much more friendly and curious, and would often give open, comfortable interviews without hesitation.

While my participation was welcomed most openly in the third yeshiva, Osher Shlomo, interviews proved more difficult to procure because of the small number of students and rabbis there. The following figure shows the number of student and teacher interviews I conducted at each institution. Again, because of the urgency and diligence with which both rabbis and students pursued their respective teaching and learning tasks, it was difficult to predict or control how many people at each yeshiva would grant me an interview on any given day. My goal, then, became to simply interview as many people as possible, rather than maintain a consistent, limited number of repeatable interviews at each location. Keeping similar numbers was also challenging because of the different numbers of students enrolled at each yeshiva. *Or Akiva* was the largest, with hundreds of students, while *Merkaz David* hosted approximately eighty, and *Osher Shlomo* only around ten.

[1] Lisa Given, "Qualitative Research Methods" in *The Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology*, ed. Neil J. Salkind (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. 2008), 827-831.
[2] Mills and Morton, *Ethnography in Education*, 2013.
[3] *Pirkei Avot* 3:2
[4] ibid.
[5] Psalms 39:3; *B. Ber.* 5a

Interview Data

| Location | Teacher Interviews | Student Interviews |
|---|---|---|
| *Merkaz David* | 8 | 8 |
| *Or Akiva* | 9 | 5 |
| *Osher Shlomo* | 2 | 4 |
| Unaffiliated | 4 | 5 |

I selected the students and rabbis to interview based on my interactions as participant-observer in daily classes, meals, prayers and other activities. Initial interviewees often recommended others with whom I should speak. This introduced me to people and communities that I would never have encountered otherwise. For instance, when one student at *Merkaz David* had told me about a place where he went to study in the breaks between classes, I joined him at what turned out to be *Osher Shlomo*. I never thought that several months later, the third yeshiva where I had planned to study would rescind its offer, and I would make *Osher Shlomo* my final research site. This increased access helped shed additional light on my research questions by leading me to others I might not have encountered had I kept my interviewing pool as limited as I had planned.

The quality of my interviews was also enhanced by my immersion in sacred texts. Before I first interviewed Rabbi Kellermann at *Merkaz David*, for instance, I had read several key texts about its philosophy of education, including *The Educator's Privilege* and *Principles of Education and Guidance.* Because I had read key portions of the text in the original Hebrew, I was able to lead with my first question of the interview, "What do you think the *Rebbe* thought about the difference between *hadrakha* (הדרכה) and *hora'a* (הוראה)?" Caught off guard, Rav Kellermann asked, "Where did you hear about that?" "I read it in this book," I replied, placing it on the table. After an appreciative smile and a nod or two, he proceeded to take my questions more seriously, which resulted in a much better interview overall. Because of my familiarity with such relevant texts in their original languages, rabbis were generally more respectful and open to my interviews than they may have been otherwise.

As I spent more time at *yeshiva*, my interview questions began to change. Rather than continually adhere to the same set of questions, I sat down before each interview and evaluated which questions would be most appropriate to ask of my interviewee. While questions like, "What is the relationship between teaching and holiness in Judaism?" remained mostly unchanged, I customized other questions to the expertise and experience of each individual I interviewed. This allowed me to deepen my understanding of several core questions while continually expanding and enriching my interviews and fieldnotes alike.

But no matter their nature or quality, there were topics that such interviews, even when combined with in-depth textual analysis, could not breach. This was especially apparent when it came to defining the meaning of holiness. Just as Rabbi Akiva had said, rabbis and their disciples seemed to swim in the waters of Torah. As such, their understanding of such fundamental concepts as holiness, teaching and learning was, simply put, the water in which they swam, and so was difficult for them to articulate. Rather than uniquely rely on either sacred writings or in-depth interviews about Torah's waters, I chose to plunge in myself, participating as deeply as an outsider could in each community where I studied.

## Participant Observation

*As with water, if one does not know how to swim in it, he will end by drowning, so with words of Torah: if one does not know how to swim in them and teach them, he will drown in the end.*[1]

If I did not learn to swim in Torah's waters myself, said the Talmud, I would almost certainly be overwhelmed by them. From this perspective as well as that of ethnography, I chose to participate and immerse myself in these communities firsthand. "Since the study of man is in an important sense participatory, "wrote Smart, "it is fatal if cultures including our own are described merely externally, without entering into dialogue with them.[2] Though perhaps not exactly calling for an ethnographic plunge, the kind of meaningful dialogue became much easier among these communities as I became awash, as it were, in every element of their cultural context that the limits of access would allow.

With this in mind, I participated in daily activities as a visiting student-researcher in each of these *yeshivot*, making a special effort to build trust with both teachers and students. Every day, I took extensive fieldnotes[3] throughout six months of participant observation in three principal *yeshivot*, with limited visits and informal interviews elsewhere as access and opportunity allowed. In my observations as an active participant,[4] I attended daily classes, acting as a student-researcher during each class, taking lunch breaks with the students, studying Talmud and immersing myself in spoken and textually-based languages, including Yiddish, Aramaic, Greek and both Ancient and Modern Hebrew. In many cases, I was permitted to work with a learning partner (*khavrusa*—חברותא) and actively contribute to class discussions as a full member.

On one occasion, there were an odd number of students Rabbi Kellermann's *Gemara* class, and I was given the chance to study that day's passage with a *khavrusa* (חברותא), or learning partner. As we translated and discussed together, I heard the shouts of *khavrusa* pairs all around me, and quickly became caught up in the thrill of our own debate. "Just as one piece of iron sharpens another," says the Talmud, "so two scholars sharpen each other's mind by discussion," while "words of Torah do not abide in which who studies alone."[5] In Talmudic terms, a new fire and sharpness had entered my Talmudic study that had not been present as I studied on my own. Plunging in to actively participate in the process of learning clarified the meaning of relevant texts, contextualized past interviews, better prepared me for future ones and enriched my understanding in ways that neither reading, interviewing, nor both in tandem could have done on their own.

Such participation was crucial to understanding the rabbi-disciple relationship, itself identified as one of Jewish education's most sacred dimensions. To come to know such holiness, the Talmud said, study on its own was no substitute for simply spending time each day with one's teacher. Just as "enacting Torah is greater than its study alone,"[6] so, too, was living the rabbi-disciple relationship firsthand better than only knowing of it from afar. Because of one such relationship I cultivated with *Or Akiva's* Rav Levi, I found myself strolling with him through his neighborhood one day as he taught me about the nature of sanctity. As we walked, he taught me firsthand how holiness was better understood by living with it than by reading about it. Without having cultivated the closeness so essential to the rabbi-disciple relationship, an entirely deeper dimension of my understanding of holiness

---

[1] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:2, §3; *M. Teh.* 1:18; *Sifra* Deuteronomy, §48

[2] Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred,* 104.

[3] Emerson, Fretx and Shaw, *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, 2011.

[4] Adler and Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research,* 1987.

[5] *Ta'anit* 7a.

[6] *Berakhot* 7b.

might have been lost. In short, such active participation by which I plunged in and swam through Torah's living waters was crucial to my method. I had to do so carefully, however, only ever doing as much as was practical and permissible within the often formidable constraints of access.

Such access was particularly challenging because of my status as a non-Jew. Key Jewish texts often speak of the Jewish people as "set apart from other nations,"[1] and enumerate a litany of rules and regulations regarding proper conduct with those not of their community. Such passages do not explicitly prevent non-Jews from entering *yeshivot* (ישיבות) or synagogues (בתי כנסת) where much of Judaism's sacred teaching and learning take place. However, it is rare for non-Jews to be granted full access to such educational environments as these. This posed a significant problem.

Considering the participatory character of teaching and learning and the intimately human dimensions of holiness under consideration, having access to these educational environments was essential. To gain the deep, ethnographic insight I sought in these communities, I not only needed to enter their places of worship and learning, but be permitted to speak and interact with individuals who taught and learned there. This was to mean more than just sitting in the hall with a notebook. To understand such difficult concepts and relationships as I had undertaken to do, I needed to enter their classes, listen to rabbinic lectures, debate with students and spend significant time in their religious literature. I had to do all of this, again, while following ethical research guidelines and avoiding the inclination (and even, at times, the advice from some within the Jewish community) to pretend to be Jewish for the sake of gaining access more easily. I addressed these problems with thorough preparation before fieldwork and vigilant transparency with leadership throughout it. After inquiring at dozens of Jerusalem's *yeshivot,* the leadership of these three, fully aware of my academic intentions and non-Jewish status, granted me full access to their communities.

## Data Collection and Analysis

I kept a meticulous record of observations and reflections in a daily fieldnote journal. This journal became the main repository of my insights on textual analysis, interviews and my own participant observation at the *yeshivot.* I wrote this record by hand for two reasons. First, it allowed me to write quickly in multiple languages and draw sketches of classroom layouts and *yeshiva* architecture. Second, a physical journal was more welcomed in the *yeshiva* environment than a laptop computer. As I gathered and analyzed this data, I followed accepted qualitative research standards.[2] I translated and transcribed this data, which included fieldnotes, interviews and lectures, then analyzed transcripts using NVivo, keeping each community separate from the others.

In this first analysis, I listed more themes than were practical to describe in later findings chapters. So, I analyzed the quotes I had coded several more times, eliminating, combining and simplifying themes with each iteration. At the end of this process, I arrived at six themes for each of the three *yeshivas* where I had studied. Based on these themes, I selected stories, experiences, interview quotes and citations from sacred texts that contextualized the thematic analyses that followed. This combination of contextualizing narrative followed by thematic analysis served as the framework for each of the three findings chapters.

[1] Leviticus 20:26

[2] These included member checking, transcript review, prolonged engagement, triangulation of data, progressive subjectivity checks, maintenance of an audit trail, and persistent observation and thick description. See Yvonna Lincoln and Egon Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry* (Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications), 1985.

Because my methodology relied so heavily upon active participation,[1] I found it difficult to create appropriate critical distance between myself as researcher and the perspectives of the communities I had studied throughout the writing process. After many drafts and edits, I overcame this challenge by citing sources more specifically (i.e., sacred texts, authors, communities, traditions, etc.) and avoiding over-reaching language (i.e., "Those at *Merkaz David* say" vs. "Judaism says"). While these methods helped create critical distance in my writing, they allowed me to remain true to my goal of illustrating the emic perspectives of study participants.

## Storytelling

*Rabbi Yosi said, "There was a large basket full of fruit, but it had no handles and so could not be carried. A wise man came and made handles for it, then began to carry it by its new handles.*[2]

As a researcher, to me Torah seemed just such a basket overflowing with fruit. Understanding its nuances proved so difficult that, without something to hold onto, I thought I would never understand. Storytelling seemed provided a handle—the means by which study and fieldwork often became clear. Even Solomon's wisdom, the Sages said, was founded in part upon such stories. In this context, it seemed appropriate that stories should play a major role in both my data collection and writing. Such stories, whether from antiquity or the living memory of those who told them, played a central role in the pedagogy of each rabbi I met, each retelling contributing to the complex, interlocking web Judaism's pedagogical tradition.

One Hebrew term for this tradition is *masorah* (מסורה), whose root describes the act of passing something to another. Jewish scripture describes this tradition-act, as it were, as among the most important commandment in all of Jewish law. "And you shall teach these things your children," it says, "talking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up."[3] Every commandment related to education, *Merkaz David's* Rav Kellermann once explained, could be traced back to this simple injunction to teach, especially by storytelling. In this sense, teaching, learning and storytelling are all intimately linked. Like the ritual repetition of Passover, in these communities, stories were not just told—they were relived in the retelling. "We ourselves are words," said the Lubavitcher Rebbe. "We think of ourselves as beings that speak words. But, no, those words are who we are, they extend from our essence and they define our being."[4] Seen in this way, stories are not just pedagogic devices, but are the very substance of Judaic being in the world.

The mystic work *Sefer Yetzirah* (ספר יצירה) describes Hebrew letters, words and stories not as pedagogic tools, but divine acts whereby God created the universe. From this point of view, as mankind becomes a "partner with God in creation"[5] through the spoken word, he shares in His sanctity. Like questioning children at a Passover table, those who told stories at these *yeshivas* asked of their listeners precisely this kind of childlike faith in the power of story. In my own research, I had to do the same. Many times I was given a story instead of an answer, or a parable in lieu of an explanation. Importantly, it was while I journeyed to find the answer I sought in the stories I had been given that the greatest growth and discovery consistently took place.

---

[1] Adler and Adler, *Membership Roles in Field Research,* 1987.
[2] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:8
[3] see Deuteronomy 11:19
[4] see *Likutei Sichot*, vol. 31, *Breishit* 1
[5] see Yanki Tauber, "Telling Stories," *Chabad.org*, http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2862/jewish/Telling-Stories.htm

As I recorded, transcribed and sometimes translated such stories, I returned to their content again and again, turning it over in my mind with every revisiting. As I did so, I saw these stories in a new light as answers, rather than clever ways to avoid my questions. From a Talmudic perspective, the path to this discovery, though difficult, had already been cleared by the storytellers themselves:

> There once was a thicket of reeds so dense that no man dared enter. Whoever entered it got lost. What did a clever man do? He took a sickle, cut down a few reeds, and went in a step, cut down a few more reeds, and went in farther; and so on, until finally he went all the way in by the path he had cut and returned by the same path. Thereafter, everyone proceeded to enter and leave by that path.[1]

When I first came across this story, I considered it a good explanation of the role of stories in pedagogy. After I had returned to it several times, however, I saw that the term for "reeds" used in the story could also be translated as "voices." With this new information, which only came after I revisited the story, deepened and changed the story itself. The story had not just compared the obstacles to my understanding to a field of reeds, but to a crowd of voices competing for my attention, as well. In this light, a story told by one who had trod the path before could clear away the multitude of reedy voices that competed for my attention as I made my way toward further understanding.

In light of the importance of story in the Jewish tradition, the findings chapters that follow are written in a narrative voice. This matches the experiential orientation of the Judaic philosophies espoused by study participants, wherein principles "are not abstractly postulated...but rather, first and foremost, fleshed out in all their existential variety."[2] In this sense, such situated human experience expressed in story is not only valid, but central to the Jewish tradition. Considering this perspective, I structured the findings sections as a series of *in situ* narratives, rather than analytical expositions alone in order to arm readers "not with definitions (What is it?) but with paradigms (How does it work and how do you do it?)."[3] As such, these narratives are crucial to providing a situated context to the analyses that follow them.

Using stories in this way not only follows accepted conventions of ethnographic reporting,[4] but also stays true to the emic perspectives of study participants who use stories to the same end. Although the grammar and style used in such stories may be unlike the third-person voice typical of scholarly prose, such differences are intended to give the reader a rich and vivid picture of the context in which these stories occurred.[5] As such, the following chapters have no introductions, but instead proceed directly into their respective narratives. To illustrate the importance of these stories, I close with the following Talmudic parable:

> Consider the king who has lost a gold coin or a precious pearl in his house. May he not find it by the light of a wick worth no more than an *issar*? Likewise, do not let the parable appear of little worth to you. By its light, a man may fathom words of Torah.[6]

---

[1] see Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:8
[2] Bernard Susser, "On the Reconstruction of Jewish Political Theory," Forum, no.45 (Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization, 1982):76.
[3] Michael Rosenak, *Roads to the Palace: Jewish Texts and Teaching* (Providence, Rhode Island: Berghahn, 1995), 27.
[4] Michael William Coy, *Apprenticeship from Theory to Practice and Back Again*, ed. Michael William Coy (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); see also Mills and Morton, *Ethnography in Education*.
[5] Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner, "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject" in *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* ed. Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 733–768.
[6] see *Sifra* Deuteronomy, §49

# CHAPTER FOUR: *FARBRENGEN*

*“Two friends sat down to have a farbrengen. They opened a bottle of maskha and poured each other each a lekhaim. After staring into each other’s eyes for several hours, they wept and poured the maskha back into the bottle, saying nothing, and everything.”*

*- Rav Moshe*

It was just after sunset when a door swung gently open into the smallest room of the yeshiva’s uppermost floor. Fourteen of us looked wearily at the eager faces of two more *buhkhrim*[1] as they peeked around the corner, searching for one last spot in a room already not meant for quite so many.

For anything else, we wouldn’t have moved. Most of us had been studying since just before dawn and we were tired.

But this was Rav Moshe, and a chance to learn with him was not to be missed.

Somehow, we made room.

As we got settled, he spoke to each of us in turn, calling us by name and catching our eyes in his kind yet penetrating gaze. Moshe was younger than the other rabbis, and the friendly demeanor that made him more at ease to joke and laugh with us belied a profound patience and wisdom that seemed easier to feel than describe.

When everyone had sat in what little space remained, the door closed, he began.

“Long ago there lived a king in a high mountain city,” he said, “whose days were filled with peace. So, when stories of invasion and cruelty reached his ears, he paid no heed, for the safety of his mountain city seemed far beyond their reach. But times grew worse, and when the armies came to besiege his beloved home, his heart grew heavy with foreboding. And though for the sake of his people, he agreed to come down and speak with the invaders, under peaceful flag of truce, the king was betrayed, and he watched as foreign hands razed his home to the ground.”

“His kingdom gone and his people slaughtered, the king was spared and sent to a prison built especially for him. The cold stones of his cell were unadorned save for a single window that afforded a kingly view of the skeletal ruins of his former home. And there they left him to live out what remained of what was sure to be a life made lonely, miserable and wretched, harrowed by the memory of what was, and would never be again.”

“It was here in this outcast state that the king began to sing. His song came in three parts. The first was of intermingled joy and sorrow for the memory of what his beautiful city had once been. The second spoke of the inconsolable sorrow at having lost all he had once had. But the third—the third was resplendent. It rang with the joy of hope that one day his kingdom would be restored in full.”

We sat in silence, not daring to breathe, as doing so seemed in that moment far less important than the rest of the story that was sure to come.

[1] *Bukhrim* (בוחרים) signifies a combination “brother” and “student” in the yeshiva context.

But no such ending came.

The story finished, Moshe closed his eyes and, taking a deep breath, began to sing in a soft, deep voice, a song we were all sure had once been the very one the king had sung.

There were no words to tempt our minds and hearts away from this haunting melody and its story, and the steady song of "*lai da dai dai*" continued until, before long, we had all closed our eyes and begun to join him in repeating the simple melody, shifting from kingly sorrow to joyful hope as we sang and swayed back and forth in our seats, carried away by the ebb and flow of the story, song and rhythm.

At an unspoken signal from Moshe, the song concluded, and for a moment we all sat still in the melody's wake before he invited us to speak.

When my turn came, I again told them of my purpose in being there, and how I had never expected to be part of something quite so transcendent as what we had all just experienced. "Was this the kind of holiness I would find here?" I asked.

Moshe and the other *buhkhrim* exchanged knowing glances.

"This?" he said with a smile. "This was nothing. If you really want to experience holiness in our teaching," he said, "you need to go to a *farbrengen*."

In the days and weeks that followed, I heard it again and again. Interviewing a rabbi, learning with some *buhkhrim*, or in the midst of a *shiur*, or lesson, about a subject I would have thought completely unrelated, whenever I asked about sanctity or holiness, I heard the same thing: if you really want to know about all this, you need to go to a *farbrengen*."

I determined then that, if I really wanted to get at the heart of my questions, this was something I needed to see for myself. But a *farbrengen* was not exactly a weekly occurrence, only happening on special occasions like before a high holiday or at the visit of a prestigious rabbi.

But, as luck would have it, Purim was almost upon us at the time, and on a derivative holiday called *Purim Katan* celebrated specifically in Jerusalem, there was to be a *farbrengen*. And before I even had the chance to ask if I was allowed to attend, I was invited.

Now, normal class hours at the yeshiva were already relatively extreme, beginning in the early hours of the morning and continuing well into the evening. But *farbrengens* did not begin before about ten o'clock at night, and had been known to go well into three or four o'clock in the morning.

And so it was that, one Wednesday evening, I stayed at the yeshiva until well into the night. Once the latest classes and study sessions had finished, and not knowing what exactly to expect, I went out to have something to eat so that I would make it through the long evening. When I returned, the *zal*, or inner sanctum, had been completely transformed, the *farbrengen* about to begin.

As I entered the yeshiva's innermost sanctum, I was struck again by the symbolism of its dimensions, furnishings and architecture. Not only was it located at the yeshiva's physical center, but it housed the Torah scroll, the single most sacred object on the premises. Normally, small desks were set up throughout the room at which pairs of *buhkhrim* could learn across from one another, shouting and gesturing emotionally with their hands as they argued minute points within the corpus of Jewish law. But tonight, all these desks had been pushed together to form a single banquet table in the room's exact middle, covered completely in white cloth.

Despite this change, however, the core elements of the room remained in place. At the head of the room sat the *etz khaim* (עץ חיים), or 'tree of life': an elaborately decorated cabinet made from cherry wood that measured eight feet tall, three feet deep and five feet wide. Its face was covered with a large red velvet veil, across the top of which the following words could be read, embroidered in bright golden thread:

כי מציון תצא תורה ודבר הי מירושלים

It was a phrase from the book of Isaiah whose English translation could be rendered, "For out of Zion shall come Torah, and the speech of the Lord out of Jerusalem."

Below these words were pictured the tablets upon which Moses received Torah at Sinai, flanked by flowering vines laden with fruit. Beside all this was a single window about the height of a man, on which was painted the Jerusalem temple.

These artistic renderings represented some of Judaism's holiest imagery, and spoke to the holiness of both the place and the educative acts realized inside.

The pictured tablets along with the passage from Isaiah hearkened to the powerful ties that seemed to ever bind both rabbis and *buhkhrim* to generations past, and the importance of continuing the unbroken chain of tradition that had emanated from Sinai so long ago, and which continued to emanate today, as Isaiah said, from that very spot: from Jerusalem. We were indeed in that very place, the epicenter from which radiated the law and speech of God.

Some of the most well known lines of the Mishnah state:

Moses received Torah from Sinai and passed it down to Joshua,
and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets,
and the Prophets passed it down to the Men of the Great Assembly.[1]

This was a genealogy uninterrupted, beginning with Moses at Sinai, flowing down, master to disciple until the present day, connecting those who taught and learned that day directly back to God.

While some of the more advanced students began to lay tray after tray of food, desserts and drinks on the white tabletop at the room's center, I noticed my surroundings in more detail, as until then I had not been permitted to spend a great deal of time in the *zal*.

The ceiling was covered with lights. Although the remainder of the building and its environs were poorly lit by the halfhearted glow of fluorescent bulbs, most of which were not working, this room was awash with the warm light of lamps, recessed lighting and chandeliers. The Hebrew word for holiness, *kedusha* (קדושה), has etymological roots in the Assyrian term *kudusu*, which means "bright." In much the same way as the warmth and light of a roaring fire welcomes you, even beckons you to draw near to the hearth, the brightness of these lights welcomed and beckoned me to this holy place.

More food than we could have possibly hoped for lay spread before us. Popcorn, pastries, crackers and dip, soft drinks, pretzels and chocolate cake adorned the tables. Although a quarter of an hour had passed and there seemed to be only a handful of people waiting for the event to begin, enough food had been laid to feed at least fifty, if not more.

As I sat, trying my best to blend in, still a little nervous that some new rabbi, unaware of my unique situation, might identify me as an outsider and throw me out, I couldn't help but be fixated by the hundreds of leather-bound books that spanned shelves from floor to ceiling. Each was handsomely bound in only the richest and darkest of colors, their green, brown and black spines enhancing the splendor of the place as the light from the chandeliers above danced on the golden Hebrew letters etched upon their spines.

Suddenly Rav Weisman, who had been sitting quietly at the head of the banquet table for some time, content to watch as his audience took shape, stood, his formidable physical presence only outdone by his booming voice. Despite all this, no one seemed afraid of him, as the power of his presence was neither in sternness nor pride, but an abiding, albeit fierce love for the *buhkhrim* who'd come to learn as his feet.

As he stood, the mingled noise of murmured conversation quickly died away, and with neither a word of welcome nor any other fanfare to speak of, what I had been told was the heart of education's sanctity itself had at last begun.

*Purim Katan*, he began, was a day of happiness—a day of *simcha* (שמחה), and it was our duty to rejoice, and to do so in that very moment. He stood as he spoke, words tumbling out in a frenzied collage of English, Yiddish and Hebrew. "The time to be happy," he told us, "is in the here and now." And in that very 'here and now', we listened with rapt attention, for to so many of these men there gathered, there could have been no greater happiness than this: to listen with bated breath as the living words of Torah met their ears streaming forth from their beloved Rav. He went on, repeating his call to *simcha* (שמחה) again and again, employing

[1] *Pirkei Avot* 1:1

that age-old Judaic method of *khazarah* (חזרה) to repeat and repeat the same message from as many angles as possible that its meaning might settle all the more deeply into the corners of our minds.

As I looked around, wresting my attention from the Rav's compelling and fervent discourse, I saw the faces of those who listened around me. Even as older students swerved in and out of what had become a small jungle of chairs and people, replenishing the rapidly diminishing supplies of food that had only moments before seemed far too much for so small a group, hands and arms reaching between, around and across them, the listeners' gaze stayed fixed on the Rav. They looked on almost without blinking, blindly stuffing their faces with whatever food lay most near at hand, never once looking away from the imposing figure of Rav Weisman who held them spellbound in their seats around the banquet laid before them. And all the while, more men kept pouring in.

"*Freiliche!*" he shouted, "*Freiliche!*" And though many of us didn't know the Yiddish term for "happier," we understood what he meant as, between shouts, he listed reason after reason we all had to rejoice.

I suddenly lost focus when someone nearby handed me a stack of plastic cups. I took one and passed the rest down the row, and noticed Dani (one of the advanced students) darting about the table with a bottle of Vodka, hurriedly pouring no more than an inch of the clear liquid (though they gave me Sprite) into each plastic cup thrust at his face as he whisked quickly by.

After the Rav had spoken for ten minutes or so, he stopped and, seeing that everyone's glass was full, shouted, "*Lekhaim!*" and drained his cup. "*Lekhaim!*" we all shouted back, and, draining our own cups, immediately raised them in the air again as Dani ran to fill them as quick as he could.

But in the midst of Dani's hectic rush to fill the outstretched cups about the room, Rav Weisman suddenly slapped an open palm against the table, shaking the food and cups as I nearly jumped from my seat. But, even more surprisingly, he continued slapping the table, establishing a joyful rhythm about the pace of a heartbeat, to which he soon began to sing.

Moshe had told us about this. In *Chabad* philosophy, a rabbi's words were heard and understood by the mind. And though learning, in its first stages, occurred there, the mind alone could not realize learning's higher and more divine purpose of elevating the whole soul to God. It must, in the end, reach past the mind and enter the heart. Only then would its process and outcome be sanctified—only then would it be holy.

But between head and heart, Moshe said, lay the throat—a symbol of the complicated mess that interferes with the connection between them. Were the knowledge understood in the mind never to descend to the heart, divine knowledge of Torah would not, even could not, become part of one's soul, and that part of the educative process intended to elevate mankind to a holy connection with God would go unrealized, the fruits of its sanctity untasted.

The solution, Moshe had told us, was music. To sing the songs of the great Rebbes cleared the throat of all of its obstructive gunk, leaving the potent connection between head and heart so crucial to the sanctification of the learning process free to flow. And so, for the consecration of our learning, for its conversion to soulful from cerebral, we joined in the song.

And in ways heard and unheard, the song was powerful.

Rav Weisman's rich, bright tenor hadn't finished the first line before the others, recognizing the familiar tune, joined in. Note by note, *buhkhrim* around the table added their voices to the throng until, even before the first chorus, the entire room was pounding with the echo of their joyful noise. Far from the tone deaf warblings of a drunken party, it seemed as though everyone present could not only carry a tune, but had a strong, powerful voice they added to the fray. But however loud they may have sung, their combined voices were no match for Rav Weisman's, which rose high above their own, like a tenor solo cutting through the crowded harmonies of an opera chorus.

And it only grew louder. Dishes and cups shook as dozens of young men struck the table again and again with one hand, while the other held aloft a plastic cup, waiting to receive another fill for the next "*Lekhaim!*" And in the midst of it all, when I checked my digital recorder, I stared in disbelief as the amplitude bars displayed red, realizing that all it would record was static. It was simply too loud.

Slowly, almost without thinking—just as we did as we prayed, read and studied—we began to sway as we sang, carried away in the rhythm of the song. Communing with God by every means available, we sang, we pounded, and we moved, as the Psalmist once wrote, with "all our bones."[1]

Like "a candle to the Lord"[2] whose flame flickers ever Heavenward, this *shukuling* movement, say the Sages, simply cannot be helped, as it symbolized the striving of the human soul for holiness—striving to leave the body and return to God.

And so we rocked, swaying back and forth, left to right, repeating the uncomplicated melody again and again until the Rav began singing more gently, the pounding beat ceased and the last note fell from even the most boisterous among us.

When the singing finally came to an end, my ears were ringing—yes, ringing. I had never heard such loud, joyous singing in all my life, all without a microphone in sight.

Pausing a moment to catch his breath, the Rav soon began speaking again, returning to the theme of happiness he had so passionately spoken of only moments before. As the letters of the Hebrew word for Messiah (*mashiach* (משיח)), if rearranged, spelled *sameach* (שמח), the Hebrew word for "happy," the hope of Messiah's coming was to fill our minds (and hearts, by virtue of the singing) with the happiness he spoke of.

Assigning such deep meaning to the rearranging of Hebrew letters was typical here. Much like how the Jewish people were made holy by their connection to God, Hebrew was not just another language, but the *lishon hakodesh* (לשון הקודש), the Holy Tongue itself. In Jewish mysticism, it was by virtue of the Hebrew language, even the very Hebrew letters themselves, that God created the universe. And so, any inference made from Hebrew letters, whether in their shape, arrangement or meaning, carried with it a potency and validity all its own, its sanctity emanating from He who used them to create all things.

---

[1] Psalms 35:10, "The candle of the Lord is the soul of man" or "כל עצמותי תאמרנה יהוה מי כמו"
[2] see Proverbs 20:27, "The candle of the Lord is the soul of man," or "נר יהוה נשמר אדם."

When around ten or fifteen minutes had passed, the Rav and his students shared another "*Lekhaim!*," whereupon they all began to pound the table and sing again. And though it was a fresh melody, it exhibited all the melodic effulgence of the last. Unlike Moshe's *nigun,* however, these *nigunim* were neither meditative nor accompanied by a story. No such explanation was to get in the way of the consecratory power of song, whose melody was sung entirely without words for the same reason. It was expected that most already knew these tunes, and those who did not (including myself) weren't taken outside, removed from the song to learn the song. No, we were taught in the moment, expected to learn as we joined wholeheartedly in the song ourselves.

Singing a tune even more lively than the last, we swayed as we sang, banging our hands against the table before us. All around me, men began closing their eyes as they sang and swayed, not wanting even the vista before them to detract from the transcendent power of their intonations, wordless, though full of meaning.

As I did my best to sing the unfamiliar melody, wondering whether I should close my eyes to feel the music or keep them open to observe the unfolding scene, one of the *buhkhrim* suddenly stood and began to dance a slow, rhythmic dance to the beat of our song. Before a moment had passed, he was joined by one, then another and another of his brethren. Placing their arms on the shoulders of their neighbors, they stepped and danced together, singing and swaying all the while. Before long, nearly everyone had joined in, and the slap of palms on tables was replaced by the pounding of dancing feet on the ground as the tremors that had before only shaken the tables now rattled even the chandeliers above.

"When the body becomes the soul's vehicle," said Rav Silberberg, "the body is seen as sacred, as the temple of the soul, and the medium by which we do goodness in this world."[1] Having come from a tradition whose founders rejected medieval Lithuanian Judaism's overemphasis of the cerebral at the expense of the spiritual, this yeshiva's elevated focus on *devekut*, or clinging to God, emphasized communion with the divine, making rituals like this one sacramental—communions with God and His holiness.[2]

And so we danced our sacred dance in bodies created *betselmo* (בצלמו), in God's own image, singing songs without words with eyes closed in the hopes that such *kedushat einayim* (קדושת עיניים, or "holiness of the eyes") would protect them from mundanity's despoiling influence.

Much like before, whether by waning energy or some other unspoken signal, the song slowly died away, and the Rav began again. Only moments after he had begun, however, a bent, wizened figure unexpectedly appeared in the doorway beside him, having just entered from the street. All at once, Rav Weisman stopped in mid-thought and stood in silent reverence. Quickly following suit, we stood ourselves, and although none of us recognized the elderly man, it was clear that Rav Weisman both knew and revered him, and that was enough for us.

He made his way slowly through the crowd, greeting young and old alike with bright eyes and an exhausted smile. Only after he had sat in the chair at the head of the table from which Rav Weisman had risen to offer him a place did we all sit in unison, neither speaking nor

[1] Rabbi Naftali Silberberg, "Why Does Jewish Law Forbid Cremation?" *Chabad.org,* http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/510874/jewish/Why-Does-Jewish-Law-Forbid-Cremation.htm
[2] Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane,* 14.

eating for fear of offending that silence by which we honored this revered stranger in our midst.

He spoke more quietly than Rav Weisman, and most of what he said was lost to those of us who strained to hear him. And though the reverence had been palpable from the moment he entered, that reverence was not for him.

It is the practice of those at *Merkaz David* to ritually stand on two occasions only: when the Torah is removed from its resting place in the *etz khaim* (עץ חיים) to be read before the congregation, and when a great rabbi enters a room. But the reverence in both cases is for the same thing—it is reverence for Torah (תורה)—the living, ever-continuing teaching passed from God to Moses and through generations of wise men such as he who stood before us, down to the present time.

When we stood for this unknown Rav reverenced by our own great teacher, we were not honoring or reverencing him as a man, but the living Torah which he embodied. Walking before us, just as much as the ink and parchment of a Torah scroll, was a living, breathing manifestation of God's Teaching on earth.

However difficult it may have been to hear him, it was clear that he was telling stories. Of all those ways in which he could have addressed us, this most famous of rabbis in this most holy of cities, he chose to tell stories. Some were fictional, others based on personal experience, but all were told with the narrative care of a parent speaking to his children.

Yet, these stories were not for entertainment, meant to distract those who heard them from the details of their lives they wished to escape for a time. Rebbe Nachman, a luminary among Chassidic rabbis, was once heard to say, "The world tells them stories to put them to sleep. I tell you stories to wake you up." Like Reb Nachman, the unknown Rav told us stories to teach us—to awaken our minds to the Godly knowledge that would, with care, descend unencumbered into our hearts.

Rabbi Katz, who taught an early morning class in Chassidic philosophy at the yeshiva, often explained the importance of stories as divine, didactic tools in the hands of worthy men who sought to learn from them together. For beyond its factual, surface layers, each story contained a *mashal* (משל), an analogy which expressed truths beyond the scope of the story itself. Beneath that, he explained, at the heart of every *mashal* (משל), was hidden not only one meaning (*nimshal* (נמשל)), but *nimshalim* (נמשלים) without end, as God, the great *ein sof* (אין סוף), or Endless One, Himself, was their Author. It was even said that the secret to Solomon's wisdom lay not in his capacity to judge, but in his ability to see thousands of layers of *nimshalim* (נמשלים) in every passage of Torah.

Of course, the few of us straining to hear the unknown Rav were no sagely gathering of young Solomons. Yet, we listened intently, hoping for at least a glimpse at the *mashal* (משל) of his stories, if not a look further into the *nimshalim* (נמשלים) in their depths.

But, almost as quickly and abruptly as he came, the old Rav left. As Rav Weisman thanked him for the profound lessons he had taught us, we sang together another *nigun* (ניגון) as he walked slowly through the crowd and out the door. As I looked around at the confused faces of my fellow *buhkhrim*, it seemed I wasn't the only one who hadn't heard many of the profound lessons Rav Weisman had mentioned.

But our inability to understand the depth of his lessons had been part of Jewish education for generations. A Rav once related the story of Mordechai, a non-observant Jew who had given three hundred gold pieces to a famous rabbi in exchange for the pleasure of watching him walk around his village pulling Mordechai's cart like a beast of burden.

As he watched the great scholar pulling his cart, humiliated and alone, Mordechai felt remorse for what he had done, and asked the great Rav for forgiveness and a blessing. As he forgave him, the great rabbi also blessed Mordechai that he might experience the joy of the Sabbath, or *shabbas* (שבת), just like the great Rav himself.

From that time forward, as Mordechai went about his work, he was heard to say to himself, "*Shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming..." over and over. Buying in the market, riding through the street and even at home, he said again and again, "*Shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming..."

When his wife saw this sudden change, she prepared their home for *shabbas* for the first time in years. But, when it finally came, Mordechai immediately fell unconscious to the ground.

He lay there for the next twenty-five hours, completely lifeless, until the moment *shabbas* ended, when his eyes opened, he jumped up and, to his wife's great surprise, immediately began repeating to himself, "*Shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming..."

Another week passed in much the same way until the moment the *shabbas* candles were lit, when he fell to the ground again until, waking the next day he began muttering to himself again, "*Shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming, *shabbas* is coming..."

Worried, Mordechai's wife invited one of his friends over for the next *shabbas* to witness this strange miracle for himself. After watching the story unfold, the friend went to the great Rav, asking him to remove the blessing so that Mordechai might lead a normal life again. "This is impossible," the Rav replied, "for the blessing came from heaven."

"But," he continued, "I know what is happening to your friend."

"Poor Mordechai," explained the Rav, "does not yet have sufficient vessels in his soul to receive the light that is flowing into his mind and heart from Heaven. But, if he would be willing to come to my yeshiva and learn for five years," he went on, "Mordechai would eventually develop the capacity to receive the heavenly light of Godly knowledge that up until now has been altogether too much for him to receive."

We who had been unable to grasp the profound *nimshalim* (נמשלים) of the unknown Rav were not to blame. Rather, we had yet to develop sufficient room within our souls with which to receive so much light as he had been so willing to share, and which Rav Weisman seemed ready and able to receive.

After our guest had gone, the night went on in much the same way as it had. There were no more surprise visitors, but we kept singing, the Rav kept speaking, and everyone (except myself, who abstained) kept drinking.

As midnight drifted further and further into the past, the mood in the room began slowly to change. Those who had come only for the fun of it had, one by one, trickled away, preferring sleep to whatever the rest of the night might hold. Those of us who remained sang songs more and more solemn to accompany less and less drinking, fewer and fewer dances, and a transition from Rav Weisman's lectures to conversations with him in a smaller group of only ten or so gathered in the corner.

It was for these very moments that the entire *farbrengen* endeavor had been planned. Between two and four in the morning, only those who really wanted to be there, who really wanted to receive the light and knowledge they had been seeking throughout the long hours of each preceding day, still remained.

Those moments were blessed not with one sanctity, but several, each graded to the upmost potency in the circumstances in which we then found ourselves.

We were in Jerusalem, a space already set apart in Judaism as holier than the rest of the world. Yet, within that holy precinct we had been placed in an even tighter concentric circle of even greater holiness, within the walls of a yeshiva, a place set apart and dedicated to the perpetual study of Torah. Further still, within that world we had been admitted into the presence of the Torah scroll, in the holiest heart of the yeshiva itself. But with every passing hour, the holy ground on which we stood was sanctified all the more by sacred time, as well.

Nearly seventy men had begun to listen, eat, sing and dance earlier that evening, when the hour was easy and the food plentiful. But slowly, the road became more difficult to follow, and the dedicated were separated from the casual, minute by minute, hour by hour, until we had arrived at our final group. Fewer than a dozen of us, determined to absorb more of the light that we were certain awaited those who had braved the ticking barriers of temporal sanctity endured through long hours of patient waiting, had made it to that moment. We then found ourselves standing not only on holy ground, but in holy time, as well.

But the sanctity of our circumstances was made all the more holy by Rav Weisman who, though neither as famous or as revered as our visitor, was an embodiment of God's Teaching in the world, and so of His holiness, as well.

So there we sat, on holy ground, in holy time, receiving holy Teaching from a holy man.

Among those who had remained, I noticed several learning partners (or *khavrusa* (חברותא), as they called them) whom I had seen studying together during the past several weeks. These were neither friends nor study partners alone, however, for theirs, said the Talmud, was a bond more akin to brotherhood than friendship, one of becoming rather than study alone.

The Talmud tells of Honi Me'aggel[1] who, after sleeping under a Carob tree for seventy years, woke one day to search for his son, with whom he had learned Torah all his life. But with his son long dead, they gave him a different *khavrusa* (חברותא) who, rather than challenge him, only praised Honi for his wisdom and insight. Seeing what life and study would be like without the sharpness and discernment of his son he famously said, *khavrusa oh mitusa* (חברותא או מיתותא), "Give me *khavrusa* (חברותא), or give me death." Soon thereafter, he died.

[1] *Ta'anit* 23a.

It was just such a bond of *khavrusa* (חברותא) by which those few men that remained at the *farbrengen* were tied, and the power of that brotherhood was easy to see. Yet, no matter what these men could do for one another in the midst of such a bond, they still needed a teacher. They needed their rabbi, for as it was theirs to learn, so it was his to bring them instruction (הוראה) and guidance (הדרכה).

And though each had their own immutable role to play, in one thing were they all equal. All, both student and teacher alike, were there to learn from and commune with God, and it was in that very thought—of their own nothingness in the face of God's perfection—that they found an equality that, though never deteriorating into sameness, united them in the same sacred purpose—their unique roles intact, on equal footing before Him.

Amidst this sacred purpose, the Rav called on us, one by one, by name, asking questions only one who knew us all would know to ask. After some time, when answers grew sparse and conversation slow with the lateness of the hour, one of the *buhkhrim* finally spoke out.

"Rav," he said, rather timidly, "I don't like to pray. Can you help me?"

Only in that moment did the whole *farbrengen* begin to make sense to me.

The story is told of two sons and their father who visited the esteemed Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi. All through the meal the two sons were silent, until Rav Yehuda decided to give them some wine to "loosen their tongues." Soon after, they began to speak openly of their hatred and disdain for the great rabbi, who in turn grew angry.

Their father, however, intervened with a *halakhic* insight that would become an adage of Judaism forever afterward.

"Rabbi," he said, "do not be angry. The Hebrew words for 'wine' and 'secret' are connected. So," he finished, "where wine enters in, secrets come out."[1]

In this sense, Judaism gives drunkenness a unique revelatory capacity to reveal one's true nature. For those whose good character is sincere and deep, the prospect of wine laying bare the secrets of the soul is more a blessing than a burden. For one whose righteousness is only superficial, however, the loss of one's inhibitions might prove more revelatory than he might like.

At a *farbrengen*, this principle was not intended to expose and separate the wicked from the righteous, but to aid those whose inhibitions would otherwise have prevented them from communicating those things closest to their hearts to those they could trust to help them.

So it was with our timid friend. His reluctant admission of struggle through prayer, which may have never otherwise seen the light of day nor entered Rav Weisman's ears, was received with kindness and understanding after so much sanctity, purity and revelation. And though perhaps he did not solve the problem all in that moment, the encounter between rabbi and disciple that had revealed such a carefully guarded secret forged a new bond of compassion and understanding that would now allow that lone disciple, and perhaps those

---

[1] *Sanhedrin* 38a.

who were privileged bystanders, to receive further light and knowledge that would have otherwise been far outside his reach.

Shortly thereafter, the Rav, with that same unspoken signal with which he had ended the singing countless times before that evening, got out of his chair, and walked slowly from the room. And as each of us filed out of the yeshiva one by one, that holiness which had been conjured up by space and time and personage slowly dissipated into the night. It was just past four in the morning.

But the story did not end there. Nor had it begun earlier that evening. Only a few short hours later, just as they had done day after day in the weeks and months that led up to that night, these stalwart men, with embers of exhausted conviction in their eyes, returned to their desks to toil in Torah once again in the early hours of a fresh dawn. Though the *farbrengen* had doubtless been a peak experience, a mountain of study had preceded it and, summited by their faith and diligence, another mountain would follow. What they and I both sought was not on such mountain heights alone, but all along their holy climb, as well.

## *Merkaz David*: The *Yeshiva*

When I first came to *Merkaz David*, I never thought I would one day take part in one of its most sacred rituals like I had the night of the *farbrengen*. When I stood at the yeshiva's entrance that night at just past four in the morning, sanctity still dripping from my fingertips as I emerged from that deep plunge into its living waters, I recalled the last time I lingered at that spot only a few short weeks before—not in the bitter watches of the night, but in the afternoon sun, where I had stood, resolute, waiting to enter its doors for the first time. When I found it, the yeshiva looked rather inconspicuous—just one more in the row of tightly-packed brick buildings that comprised the quiet reclusiveness of David Yellin Street.

I drew near and stood in the shadow of its three-story façade to escape the afternoon sun, which had only just begun to wane. A simple wooden door, thrown wide open in welcome, sat just beyond the thick, iron bars of a ten-foot-high exterior wall that surrounded the building. Its gate, however, was shut, the *yeshiva* at once open to all and closed to me. As I tried to penetrate an inner sanctum already deep within the sanctum of Jerusalem itself, my perpetual and irreversible status as an outsider, left with neither prospect nor intention of ever gaining full membership in the community, weighed heavily on my shoulders. So, I stood and waited, and after what seemed like ages without seeing a single soul, I made one last call to the front desk. To my surprise, a friendly voice answered, only to appear at the gate a moment later when he knew where I was.

A balding head of tousled, red-brown, curly hair walked briskly up to meet me at the formidable iron bars of *Merkaz David's* main entrance, swinging wide the gate I had thought impenetrable only moments before. Barel, the yeshiva's main secretary, wore a blue shirt with a dark *kippa*, and through a thin, scraggly beard, spoke in a kindly manner, offering me a small, clear plastic cup of water as I sat on the other side of a desk simply stuffed with books and paper. Swinging back and forth in his swivel chair, he told me of the nearly seventy male students, aged 20-29, who came to study there from all walks of Jewish life: some from kosher households, others in the first step in their journey back to faithful living. One elite group, he told me, was enrolled in *Merkaz David's smicha* program working toward their rabbinic ordination, supervised by only the most rigorous rabbis among them.

The students all lived in a dormitory just beside the yeshiva, he explained, where they spent what little free time remained to them after their long hours of daily study getting the rest they so desperately needed. Most of them came from predominantly English-speaking

countries: America, South Africa, Australia and the United Kingdom, though some hailed from places as diverse as Latin America, Eastern Europe and Israel itself. After spending anywhere between a month to a year studying in Jerusalem, they either returned home, or chose to stay in the area on a more permanent basis.

I stopped him only once to ask for a class schedule. Without hesitation, he began printing out the weekly schedules for *Merkaz David's* four classes: the Jewish Studies Program (JSP), and Yeshiva Levels One, Two and Three, explaining to me the differences between each and who taught which class. Within an hour of our meeting, I found myself sitting in the chair nearest Rabbi Kellermann as he taught Jewish philosophy to the beginning students. In the weeks that followed, I would attend several classes at every level at *Merkaz David*, joining in with students from the most inexperienced to those who had nearly become rabbis themselves.

Though Barel hadn't told me about the nine rabbis who taught these young men, I would meet, observe, interview and develop a warm friendship with each one before my time at *Merkaz David* had come to an end. Each of them specialized in a specific area of Jewish studies, ranging from Jewish philosophy to *Chassidus* and *Talmud.* Some, like Rabbi Kellermann, focused primarily on the beginning students in the Jewish Studies Program, while others like Rabbi Aronin taught the yeshiva's most advanced students. These men, much like the students they taught, had themselves come from many different backgrounds, and ranged in age from their early thirties to well into their sixties. But age did not play a hierarchical role among them. As the Talmud said, "Look not at the container, but at what is in it. A new container may be full of aged wine, while an old container may be empty even of new wine."[1]

*Merkaz David* was a *Chabad* (חב״ד) *yeshiva*. *Chabad* (חב״ד) itself began in 1775 under the leadership of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, one of the great students of the Maggid, who himself had studied under the founder of *Chassidism,* the *Ba'al Shem Tov* (בעל שם טוב). In the era just before *Chassidism,* meticulous Torah scholarship was considered the best, perhaps even the only way to commune with God in Judaism. *Chassidism* expressed a "vigorous resentment" at dedicating so much time exclusively to study at the expense of personal piety. One early *Chassid* called such scholars *shedin yehuda'in* (שדין יהודין), or "Jewish demons."[2] Although these strong feelings did not "imply a rejection of conventional Torah study,"[3] the Lubavitcher Rebbe (*Chabad's* founder) espoused a different approach to reconciling these two elements. While maintaining a balance between the importance of both Torah study and *Chassidic* principles of personal piety, he introduced (among other philosophies) the idea that one's thoughts and actions could be governed by wisdom, understanding and knowledge, whose Hebrew equivalents *khokhma* (חכמה)*, bina* (בינה) and *da'as* (דעת) form the acronym *Chabad* (חב״ד), by which the movement and its core philosophy are known. It was this very thoughtfulness with which *Chabad Chassidism* approached the ideas of teaching and learning that led me to study with them in the first place.

## Themes

Each section that follows corresponds to a theme illustrated in the *farbrengen* story. Drawing upon the rich context of that narrative and an in-depth analysis of fieldnote data,

---

[1] *Pirkei Avot* 4:27

[2] Norman Lamm, *The Religious Thought of Hasidism: Text and Commentary* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999), xlii.

[3] ibid.

each theme explicitly addresses the relationship between teaching and learning and Judaic holiness. Each theme's title is followed by a short quote from the *farbrengen* narrative to highlight the rich context to which it belongs. This is followed by a discussion of indigenous artifacts, Jewish literature, fieldnote and interview data and relevant academic literature.

The themes begin with "Practice and Divine Proximity," which presents the foundation for the remainder of the chapter. "Spatial and Temporal Sanctity" further lays this foundation by explaining the sacred contexts in which Jewish education is realized. "Storytelling, Inheritance and Inherent Sanctity" shifts the discussion from the features of holiness to its more human dimensions, storytelling chief among them. "Sacred Music and Physicality" takes this human dimension one step further by discussing the sanctity of the human voice and its use as part of the inherent holiness of the Jewish soul, or *nefesh* (נפש).

The next theme, "Relational Holiness: The Role of a Teacher and *Khavrusa,*" illustrates how holiness itself can be both influenced by and made manifest in one's fellow participants in the educational process. The chapter's final theme, "Worthiness and Dispositional Consecration," highlights how the quality of one's character and motivations to teach and learn influence the sanctity of those processes. The chapter concludes with a brief summary of each theme and how it relates to the research question. Importantly, any overlap or repetition between these and future themes is reflective of the similarly interconnected nature of Torah learning in this context.

## *Practice and Divine Proximity*

*"A rabbi's words were heard and understood by the mind. And though learning, in its first stages, occurred there, the mind alone could not realize learning's higher and more divine purpose of elevating the whole soul to God. It must, in the end, reach past the mind and enter the heart. Only then would its process and outcome be sanctified—only then would it be holy."*

Rabbi Akiva's comparison of the Jewish people to a fish swimming in Torah not only describes the necessity of Torah study for proper Jewish living, but the living, all-encompassing nature of Torah study itself. For *Merkaz David's* rabbis and their disciples, Torah study wasn't simply a change in either capacity or perspective alone, but a process whereby they plunged in, swam and drank continuously from its waters, without which, according to the Talmud, they would almost instantly perish.[1] This all-encompassing perspective is a crucial backdrop by which to approach Judaic ideas about sanctity. Holiness is rarely referred to in Judaism's sacred writings,[2] and even on those rare occasions when it is mentioned, such passages do not possess that piercing specificity with which nearly every other element of the Jewish faith is so often described. However scarce clear definitions of sanctity may be in Jewish literature, as I plunged into the waters where yeshiva rabbis and disciples swam through interviews, observations and participation, holiness became clearer by the day.

While academic perspectives on sanctity describe its experiential,[3] philosophical,[4] sociological,[1] constructivist,[2] or efficacious[3] dimensions, such perspectives focus more on its

[1] see B. AZ 3a.

[2] Asher E. Rivlin, *Equal to All of Them: The Pedagogy of the Sages (Khazal)* (Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim Publishing House Ltd., 1985).

[3] see Paul Post, "A Symbolic Bridge Between Faiths" in *Interaction Between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and* Literature, ed. Marcel Poorthuis, Jacob Schwartz and Joseph Turner (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 357-374; Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory*; Knott, *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*.

[4] see Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* especially as a response to Kant's conception of holy as "morally good."

peripheral characteristics, often leaving its core, ontological nature largely unaddressed. Standing apart from these, Judaic holiness, or *kedusha* (קדושה) places God at its ontological center, describing sanctity as that which is connected to Him.[4] Menachem, one of *Merkaz David's* advanced rabbinical ordination students, gave me my first glimpse at the clarity and simplicity of Judaic holiness when I asked him whether holiness meant "that which was good." To this, he replied, "It's not necessarily any good act. Rather, it is an act that is based on Torah." While questions of "the good"[5] may play a role, it was only peripheral to this more fundamental characteristic, namely, holiness as a connection to God. "Sacred," said *Merkaz David's* Rav Kaplan, "does not necessarily mean *spiritual*. In Jewish terms, we talk about *Godly* instead."

This is not to say that, from a Jewish perspective, there are no experiential, efficacious or cerebral elements surrounding holiness. It does illustrate, however, that all these attributes are peripheral and subsidiary to the more fundamental quality of its connection to God. Rabbi Friedman, a philosopher and Talmudist, explained it this way:

> A good definition for the Hebrew word *kodesh* (קודש) or *kadosh* (קדוש), we generally translate as 'holy'. But a more enlightened and a more useful translation would render *kodesh* (קודש) as 'transparent', or 'transparency'. The world has a Creator. The Creator has a purpose. And yet, the creation doesn't always allow the Creator and His purpose to be visible. There's a lack of transparency. That which is holy is that which does allow the Creator and His purpose to be visible, to be noticeable.[6]

Understood as Divine transparency, holiness is not primarily concerned with the Durkheimian sacred-profane dyad. It is, instead, considered in this context to be a gradational transparency through which God and His purposes are revealed to mankind. This transparency, or the ease by which God and His ways are revealed to man, is seen to increase proportionate to one's proximity to God. In other words, the veil which normally prevents secular sensibilities from discerning the divine grows thinner with each intentional, consecratory act by which mankind draws near to Him. In the midst of realizing such sanctified *action*, one not only develops an increased capacity to discern God and His holiness, but comes to share in that holiness. This includes sharing in some of His character, or becoming holy as He is holy.[7]

So, while this perspective describes God as sanctity's source, it also holds that the burden of sanctity's realization *in practice* is placed on the shoulders of ordinary people—in this case, rabbis and their disciples. In order that a practice be made sacred, it must not only be connected to God, but enacted, realized or otherwise fulfilled by human, volitional action. Without that involvement, holiness remains inherent, though only dormant. From this perspective, holiness is forever in a state of Divine potentiality until human volition, disposition or intention make room for its consecration by virtue of an ever-increasing connection to God.

---

[1] see Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Thought*; Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1922).

[2] see Smith, *The Bare Facts of Ritual* and Marshall, *Temptation, Tradition and Taboo* in support of Arnold Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1909] 2011), 53.

[3] see Callois, *Man and the Sacred*, 22 and Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 10 on magical dimensions of the sacred

[4] Kohler, "Holiness," *in Jewish Encyclopedia,* 439-442.

[5] see Cohen's views as illustrated in Mittleman, *The Problem of Holiness,* 42.

[6] Rabbi Michael Chighel, "What is 'holiness?'" Chabad.org, http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/676159/jewish/What-Is-Holiness.htm

[7] see Parekh, *Lexical and Theological Significance of the Root* קדש *in the Book of Isaiah*; see also Leviticus 19:2.

This principle applies specifically to teaching and learning in this context. "Not study," say the Sages, "but action, is the essence of the matter"[1]—an action, explained Menachem, that Jews were obligated to fulfill at all times and in all places. "The *mitzvah*, or commandment, to learn applies to every single person, twenty-four seven," he said. "There isn't a second in which we are allowed to just sit there and do nothing. Everything you are doing has to have a purpose—even relaxing can't just be done for the sake of relaxing. It must be in order to complete more commandments," or in Menachem's case, to spend more time studying Torah. Importantly, the purpose of such dedicated time was not to eventually arrive at an outcome, but simply to be perennially involved in the process itself. "The Talmud is not a book that is interested in the conclusion [of learning]," explained Rav Kaplan. "It is interested in the process." "He who is engaged in doing the commandments," says the Talmud, "is regarded as engaged in learning them; but he who is not engaged in doing them is not regarded as engaged in learning them."[2] "The idea," continued Rav Kaplan, "was not knowledge for knowledge's sake. No," he said, "it was learning in order to connect to *Godliness*"—not through acquiring information, but by participating in the process of its study and application. As Rabbi Kellermann explained, while the knowledge of Torah is essential, "the idea is not that the *knowledge* of Torah is essential, but that the *teaching* and *studying* of it is essential."

Such participation plays a central role in the sanctity of teaching and learning in Jewish scripture. According to the Biblical narrative, when Moses asked the ancient Israelites if they were willing to keep God's commandments, they replied, "We will do and we will hear."[3] It is noteworthy, highlighted Rav Katz, that they promised to act *before* they had heard what they would be commanded to do. Citing the Levitical passage, "If ye study in my statutes, practice them[4]," the Talmudic sage Rav Hiyya taught, "As for him who studies without intending to practice, it would be better if he had never been created."[5] Another Talmudic luminary, Rav Huna, supported this view, accusing such people of "acting as if [they] had no God."[6] Those who did not practice what they learnt, then, would lose their connection to God, and so lose access to holiness, as well. Seen in this light, the role of practice in teaching and learning is seen to maintain one's connection to God, and so allow for one's sanctification in the process.

## *Spatial and Temporal Sanctity*

*"But slowly, the road became more difficult to follow, and the dedicated were separated from the casual, minute by minute, hour by hour, until we had arrived at our final group. Fewer than a dozen of us, determined to absorb more of the light that we were certain awaited those who had braved the ticking barriers of temporal sanctity endured through long hours of patient waiting, had made it to that moment. We then found ourselves standing not only on holy ground, but in holy time, as well."*

When the *Farbrengen* began, those in attendance were already enveloped in sanctity—not only by the spatial sanctity of Jerusalem, but by its temporal sanctity, as well. Enveloped in a large-scale, transient liminal state,[7] we had temporarily come to this eternal epicenter of Jewish sanctity on earth, neither outside the tradition nor yet fully Torah scholars ourselves. Within this broad, liminal umbrella, we had on that very day begun *Purim Katan*, a

---

[1] *Pirkei Avot* 1:17
[2] *B. Yev*. 109b.
[3] see Exodus 24:7
[4] Leviticus 26:3
[5] *P. Ber* 1:5, 3b; Leviticus *Rabba* 35:7
[6] B. AZ 17b
[7] see Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.*

Jewish holiday of sacred time set apart for uninhibited joy, and so were enveloped in a second concentric circle of sanctified liminality. This doubly sacred time was further consecrated by the *farbrengen* itself, an event of unique temporal significance characterized by unique behaviors, rituals and traditions held only on special occasions. Already encompassed about, then, by three concentric zones of increasing temporal sanctity, the character of the *farbrengen* became even more holy as the night drew on and those of us who remained until three and four in the morning entered a time out of time that became more sacred with each passing hour. We few had taken this already sanctified time which, from the Jewish perspective, had been given us by God, and offered it in return as a sacrifice—not of any physical object, but of time itself, and in so doing encompassed ourselves in yet another layer of temporal sanctity.

Such temporal holiness is at home in Judaism, especially in its treatment of the Sabbath, which Heschel described as a *palace in time,* "made of soul, of joy and reticence" whose atmosphere is "a reminder of adjacency to eternity."[1] Seeing a parallel between such "adjacency to eternity" and the Divine proximity of Judaic holiness generally, appropriate actions undertaken in the flux of such sacred time are themselves sanctifying, opening the eyes, as it were, to a clearer, more transparent discernment of God in whatever circumstance that time envelops. Such time intentionally set aside for a sacred purpose is "a mine where spirit's precious metal can be found with which to construct the palace in time, a dimension in which the human is at home with... [and can] ... approach the likeness of the divine."[2] Time, then, is not only a medium through which holiness is made manifest, but also a vehicle whereby men can approach the likeness of God, and in drawing closer to Him become sanctified themselves. By "painting on the canvas of time," Heschel continues, one can even join in a partnership with God in co-sanctifying the temporal elements of reality, making human acts consecratory in their own right, "a paraphrase of His sanctification."[3]

Rather than achieve temporal sanctity by setting specific moments apart as unique from or elevated above others (as in the case of the Sabbath, for instance), a secondary dimension of consecrated time speaks of how all time is sacred inasmuch as it is uniquely dedicated to the sacred study of Torah. Menachem's previous statement that, "The *mitzvah* of learning applies to every single person, twenty-four seven," taken together with the text of the *Shema*[4] that commands men to teach and learn in nearly every imaginable circumstance,[5] embodies God's injunction that all time be consecrated by its perpetual orientation toward participation in Torah study. If a student ate, Menachem explained, it was only acceptable if it was intended as a way to strengthen the body and mind for being more alert and attentive during future study. Likewise, if he slept, he must do so to have more energy for study, rather than simply to fulfill his body's natural need for sleep. In short, every moment in time was to be sanctified by its perennial orientation toward the ultimate purpose of teaching and learning Torah, itself a sacred commandment. Such perpetual, temporal consecration by orienting all conscious action toward Torah study is entirely dependent upon one's intentionality. In other words, one's motives for doing any and all volitional acts, from actions as mundane as eating and sleeping to those more discernibly sanctified as reading from the Talmud or praying, had the power to sanctify those acts, inasmuch as they were oriented toward the end goal of furthering one's study of Torah.

---

[1] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 14.
[2] ibid., 16.
[3] ibid.
[4] The *Shema* is one of Judaism's most central texts. Recited often in prayer and written in ritual objects, it emphasizes the importance of teaching Torah to the next generation (see Deuteronomy 6:4-9).
[5] see Deuteronomy 6:4-9

Torah study, however, requires not only a palace in time, but a sacred, *physical* palace for its realization, as well. One Midrashic story illustrates how Rav Samuel, standing in the street, asked Rav Jonathan to teach him from the Torah. In answer, Rav Jonathan asked him to go to the house of study, where he would gladly fulfill his request. At this, Rav Samuel was confused, "But, our master, did you not teach us, 'Wisdom crieth aloud in the street. She uttereth her voice in the broad places'?"[1] To this, Rav Jonathan replied,

> You may have read this verse, but you didn't understand it. What do you think is meant by 'Wisdom crieth aloud in the street'? It means, in the street of Torah. After all, where is a precious pearl sold? Is it not sold in its own street [of jewelers]? So it is with Torah, for Torah is to be taught in a street of its very own. What do you think 'She uttereth her voice in the broad places' means? It means in a place where room is made for her. And where is such room made for her? In synagogues and houses of study.[2]

In all my time at *Merkaz David*, never once did I witness Torah study in the streets, in someone's room, or even in the yeshiva's kitchen. Instead, such holy acts were reserved for the holy precincts prepared to host them. Whether in the 'gathering' of the *beit knesset* (בית כנסת), the homiletic exegesis of the *beit midrash* (בית מדרש) or even the invitation to sit and study at *yeshiva* (ישבה), inherent to the sanctity of Judaic teaching and learning is its realization in an appropriately sanctified environment uniquely suited to such sacred acts as these.

Yet, the reverence shown such places was neither solemn nor silent. It was, instead, loud and boisterous, seeking all the while to involve every element of the Judaic soul in being there. On my first encounter with such behavior at *Merkaz David* I wrote,

> The light and beauty of the room does not denote a sanctity for which silence and reverence is required or even appropriate. Instead, it is a place where all are welcome, even expected, to come and simply be there. Of course, a base requirement of respect is necessary, but such respect is not at all reminiscent of the hush that falls over a crowd of people as they walk into the nave of a cathedral. It was more like a welcome home, with shouts of, "Hey!" and "Glad to see you!" echoing all around us. There was a joy that came from just having people come in and study.

The orthopractic orientation so central to Judaism was manifest in their treatment of the sacred space not as an opportunity for somber silence and reflection, but as the proper occasion for discussion, argument, singing and reading aloud. It was in action, rather than inaction, by which the sacred in spaces of Jewish teaching and learning was observed.

Even Talmudic prescriptions for prayer reflect the importance of spatial sanctity in the Jewish tradition. If one is praying outside of the physical boundaries of the Biblical land of Israel, the Talmud says, he must face that land.[3] If within ancient Israel's boundaries, he must focus on Jerusalem[4]; if in Jerusalem, toward the Temple[5]; if in the Temple, toward the Holy of Holies[6]; and if in the Holy of Holies, toward the Ark of the Covenant itself. By so doing, the Talmud states, "all of the people of Israel find themselves focusing their hearts toward one place: the Holy of Holies in the Temple."[7] In this sense, the world is not divided, as Durkheim said, "*par deux termes distincts que traduisent assez bien les mots de profane et*

---

[1] Proverbs 1:20
[2] *Tanhuma, Be-hukkotai*, §3
[3] see I Kings 8:48: "And they shall pray to you by way of their land which you have given to their fathers."
[4] see I Kings 8:44: "And they shall pray to the Lord by way of the city that You have chosen."
[5] see II Chronicles 6:32: "And they shall pray toward this house."
[6] see I Kings 8:35: "And they shall pray toward this place."
[7] *Berachot* 30a.

*de sacré*,"[1] but is, instead, colored by many gradations of sanctity, with Jerusalem at their apex. Among those at *Merkaz David,* any sacred acts realized in a place of such superlative sanctity as Jerusalem would be accorded a similar degree of sanctity, as well. It was for this very reason that many of the students had come.

"I cannot separate this learning process from its Jerusalem context," I wrote in my fieldnotes one day. "There is something essential about doing this study in this city at this time. Those who come are here for a reason which, for them, is central to their study—it sanctifies it." Study, however, went beyond the spatial sanctity of Jerusalem. "When a man has knowledge," says the Talmud, "it is as though the Holy Temple were built in his days."[2] Just as the Holy Temple was on a higher plane of sanctity than Jerusalem[3], so, too, was knowledge and its related means of dissemination on an even higher plane of sanctity than the Holy City itself. Part of the centerpiece of the *beis midrash,* or central house of study, at *Merkaz David* was an enormous window painted with an image of the Holy Temple, not only suggesting that those present were in a temple of learning, but that acquiring, possessing and participating in sacred knowledge was somehow on a parallel plane of sanctity with the Temple itself. Inasmuch as the Holy Temple had housed the Holy of Holies, the most sacred physical location on earth, so, too, are teaching and learning symbolic of today's Holy of Holies which, as a sacred act, brings its participants closer to God and His sanctity.

## *Storytelling and Inheritance*

*"Long ago there lived a king in a high mountain city," he said, "whose days were filled with peace and plenty.*

According to Rav Katz, every story has infinite meaning, for coming from God, stories are, like God, *ein sof* (אין סוף), without end. So it was that Moshe, after finishing the tale of *Nigun Shamil,* began to show us only the beginning of its endless meaning. "The king's descent from his mountain home," he said, "was a symbol of the soul's descent from heaven; and the betrayal at the hands of his cunning adversaries, the pains and trials of mortality. And though he, like us, passed through trials," he went on, "the king never forgot his heavenly home, and the hope of its destined restoration in the world to come." By telling us his story, then showing us the first of infinite interpretations thereof, Moshe had asked us to participate in a process which, being endless, was not about arriving at any one, correct answer, but simply about engaging in the journey of its pursuit. Such was the power of personal storytelling in the Judaic tradition.

In the Jewish creation narrative, God created the world through speech, saying the phrase, "Let there be light,"[4] rather than simply thinking it. In this sense, through what the Talmud calls the "toil of speech,"[5] mankind may become a "partner with God in creation,"[6] bringing stories to life in the telling. In light of Judaic sanctity's connection to God's character, attributes and actions, that speech by which God realized His capacity as Divine Creator imbues speaking itself with consecratory power. In other words, by its proximity to God, speech is a sacred act, sanctifying not only that which is spoken, but the speaker, as well. Not only was man the only "speaking soul," or *nefesh khaya* (נפש חיה)[7] of creation, uniquely endowed with the power to create stories, but, the Lubavitcher Rebbe once said,

[1] Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,* 50.
[2] *B. Sanh* 92a. and *En Yakov,* ad loc.
[3] see *Kelim* 1:6-9; see also *Tosef., Kelim* 1.
[4] see Genesis 1:3
[5] *Sif.* Deuteronomy §307
[6] Tauber, "Telling Stories"
[7] see Genesis 2:7

"we ourselves are words" [1]—living realizations of Divine storytelling creativity. Both by being stories and being uniquely capable of telling them, mankind is understood to be connected to God, the great Storyteller, and so connected to His sanctity. As the principle link in that chain, "Holy stories," said Buxbaum, "are the light of the world. When we understand that," he continued, "when both tellers and listeners know they are engaged in sacred activity, we will hold stories and storytelling more dear. The teller will tell with the tongue of faith, the listeners will hear with ears of faith, and the circle of holiness will be closed."[2]

Outside of Judaism, storytelling has been called "one of the most basic forms of communication...used to transmit ideas, values, identity, and culture."[3] Among its many functions are education,[4] empowerment and motivation[5] and providing models for correct behavior.[6] In fields as diverse as law,[7] education,[8] business,[9] and health care,[10] researchers and professionals alike have "harnessed the power of storytelling to motivate, persuade, teach, and impart meaning across [their] varied disciplines."[11] Of all these functions, those at *Merkaz David* focused primarily on its power as a teaching tool, and a means by which to pass down their Teaching tradition. When I finally had the chance to interview Moshe about the story of *Nigun Shamil* and the power of story in general, he only told me one thing. "Hasidic stories," he said, "are not just bedtime stories. They're a way to transmit"—to pass down the sacred Teaching of Sinai through an unbroken chain of generations without end, linking every receiver thereof to God, to become holy by their proximity and connection to Him.

Such teaching genealogies are not unique to Judaism, however. Pianists, for instance, often seek teachers with an unbroken pedagogic pedigree to Liszt, Czerny, even Beethoven, which purportedly bring legitimacy and notoriety to their craft.[12] Even craftsmen seek a worthy craft genealogy, connecting themselves to the traditions of excellence established by their predecessors.[13] Whether in music, craft or Torah study, each link in such genealogical chains is wrought through personal, oral communication between teacher and student and, in the Jewish tradition especially, by the stories passed down in that context. These chains not only link students to their teachers, but enable them to reach across time, through the

---

[1] *Likutei Sichot*, volume 31, *Breishit* 1

[2] see Yitzhak Buxbaum, *Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994), xv.

[3] Janelle Palacios, "Storytelling: A Qualitative Tool to Promote Health Among Vulnerable Populations," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 26, no. 4 (2014): 346–353.

[4] R. Craig Roney, "Back to the Basics with Storytelling," *Reading Teacher* 42 no. 7 (1989): 520-23.

[5] Tommi Auvinen, Iiris Aaltio, and Kirsimarja Blomqvist, "Constructing Leadership by Storytelling–the Meaning of Trust and Narratives," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 34, no. 6 (2013): 496-514.

[6] Felicia Schanche Hodge, Anna Pasqua, Carol A. Marquez, and Betty Geishirt-Cantrell, "Utilizing Traditional Storytelling to Promote Wellness in American Indian Communities," *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 13, no. 1 (2002): 6-11.

[7] David Ray Papke, *Narrative and the Legal Discourse: A Reader in Storytelling and the Law* (Liverpool: Deborah Charles, 1991).

[8] Taffy Thomas and Steve Killick, *Telling Tales: Storytelling as Emotional Literacy* (Blackburn, United Kingdom: Educational Printing Services Limited, 2007).

[9] Annette Simmons, *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion through the Art of Storytelling* (New York: Basic Books, 2006).

[10] Carol Haigh and Pip Hardy, "Tell Me a Story—A Conceptual Exploration of Storytelling in Healthcare Education," *Nurse Education Today* 31, no. 4 (2011): 408-411.

[11] Palacios et al., *Storytelling: A Qualitative Tool to Promote Health Among Vulnerable Populations*, 1.

[12] Irena Kofman, "The History of the Russian Piano School: Individuals and Traditions," doctoral dissertation, University of Miami, 2001.

[13] Isaac Calvert, "Investigating the One-on-one, Master-Apprentice Relationship: A Case Study in Traditional Craft Apprenticeship," doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 2014.

generations, back to the original patriarchs of their craft and somehow converse directly with them, absorbing their skill and character as if in their presence.

Similarly, those who study Torah do so to speak across the generations and converse with the great Torah luminaries of antiquity, not only to hear the stories they would tell, but to embody what they too had embodied centuries ago. “When a man cites a tradition in the name of the person who uttered it,” says the Talmud, “he must speak as if that person were standing right beside him.”[1] Seen in this light, Jewish scripture is, as Rabbi Kaplan put it, a “living, breathing organism,” containing not concrete information, but a means by which teachers and learners of the present can connect and communicate with the great thinkers of their past by becoming so enveloped in their stories as to become like them—thinking as they thought, learning as they learned, even teaching as they taught.

This is part of the sacred inheritance of the Torah tradition, which, said Rav Kellermann, was made up of “ideas that you had to know, and that you weren’t going to know unless someone taught you.” The responsibility to give Torah to the next generation—something Menachem called Torah’s “divine tradition”—had not begun with the Deuteronomic commandment to do so, but with God Himself long before. Connected to God in this way, teaching and learning, especially through spoken story, is seen to be holy. “We’re always cognizant of the Giver of Torah,” said Rabbi Markovitz, director of *Merkaz David*. “If you’re not cognizant of the giving of Torah, then you’re not learning Torah.” By actively receiving it, the student of Torah becomes one with his ancestors as a co-receiver of the tradition with them, having heard it declared in the same way Moses heard it: by the power of speech. By the same token, when a rabbi teaches Torah to another by the power of the spoken word, he becomes one with all who have given Torah to others, the first of whom was God, who gave it to Moses at Sinai by the power of His voice. By virtue of this connection to God, speech, especially storytelling, is understood to be a holy act.

But far from being a symbolic way of connecting contemporary education to its ancient roots, both storytelling and the power of speech played a key role in the daily educative acts at *Merkaz David.* Interviewees, for instance, would often address my questions not with specific answers, but with stories. While receiving vague stories in lieu of concrete answers was frustrating at first, it became clear over time than these story-answers were invitations to think even more deeply about my questions, departing from Bruner’s “paradigmatic thinking” into more “narrative thinking.”[2] As I did so, I soon found out that Rabbi Katz’ principle of how each story contained layers of meaning *ein sof* (אין סוף), without end, was actually a practical reality, rather than mere poetical exaggeration. For while typical “paradigmatic thinking” aims to identify a single, verifiable truth, “narrative thinking” seeks after verisimilitude and meaning.[3] By substituting answers with open-ended stories accompanied by endless interpretations, teachers at *Merkaz David* abandoned the pursuit of a single, correct solution, instead asking me to engage in a process whose lack of a perfect, concrete answer made it eternal in both scope and duration.[4]

This invited us to act in order to find, rather than simply receive, the answers we sought. The invitation to act in the pursuit of understanding is characteristic of the orthopractic orientation of Judaic pedagogy. In this tradition, learning is more about acting to become part of the Teaching tradition than simply being given the facts associated with it.

---

[1] *B. Shek* 7b.

[2] Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986), 12-13.

[3] Jerome Bruner, “Life as Narrative,” *Social Research* 54, no. 1 (1987): 11-32; Jerome Bruner, “What is a Narrative Fact?” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 560 (1998): 17-27.

[4] Anthony Amsterdam and Jerome Bruner, *Minding the Law* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 141.

While this process of wrestling with and searching through a story's layered meanings was far more difficult than simply being spoon-fed an explicit answer, it illustrates Judaic pedagogy's noteworthy disinterest in efficiency and facilitation, embracing, instead, the difficulty of teaching and learning as a valuable part of the educative process, which, after all, the Talmud calls "toiling in Torah."[1]

It is, however, noteworthy that, although Bruner draws a distinction between logical and narrative thinking,[2] because Torah informs daily living, not all interpretations of these stories are valid. As such, Torah study is possessed of both logical and narrative elements. Rather than allow for individual interpretation to shift toward relativism, stories allow Chassidim to inform and deepen the meaning of their practice, while still allowing room for the maintenance of unchanging truth claims. "No set of legal institutions or prescriptions exists apart from the narratives that locate it and give it meaning," Cover explained. "For every constitution there is an epic, for each decalogue a scripture. Once understood in the context of the narratives that give it meaning, law becomes not merely a system of rules to be observed, but a world in which we live."[3] For those at *Merkaz David*, the world in which they live is not simply the content of their stories, but the process by which they are told. Like Rav Akiva's fish, the act of storytelling in this context is not just a teaching tool, but the very water in which they swim.

## *Singing and Sacred Physicality*

*"The story finished, Moshe closed his eyes and, taking a deep breath, began to sing in a soft, deep voice, a song we were all sure had once been the very one the king had sung..."*

Within the Chassidic tradition (of which *Chabad* is a branch), there is a unique connection between stories and singing. One of the key elements of this connection is in Chassidism's particular reverence for the power of the human voice. Not only is the human voice connected to the means and power by which God created the world[4] and differentiated between mankind and the animal kingdom by making him a 'speaking soul' (*nefesh khaya*—נפש חיה),[5] it is also the means by which both story and music are brought to life. Schram described this connection as follows:

> Chassidim accord music an all-important place in their lives. They continue to believe that it is through music, especially when sung by the human voice, that one can attain salvation, get rid of evil, and reach the ultimate communion with God. Thus, the Chassidim treasure the human voice—the voice that can sing and tell stories.[6]

United by the human voice that gives them life, story and song are possessed of unique power. This power is considered efficacious, salvific and sacred inasmuch as it allows mankind to commune with God. Like those who tell stories, by virtue of the human voice, those who sing sacred music are considered co-creators with God in bringing meaning and context to the world.

---

[1] see *Sif.* Deuteronomy, §307

[2] Bruner, *Life as Narrative*; Bruner, *What is a Narrative Fact?*

[3] Robert M. Cover, "The Supreme Court, 1982 Term—Foreword: Nomos and Narrative," Yale Faculty Scholarship Series, 1983: 2705.

[4] see Genesis 1:3

[5] see Genesis 2:7

[6] Peninnah Schram, *Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993), 366.

Along this vein, singing is more than a sanctifying process by which mankind may share in God's holy character and purpose. More specifically, by virtue of their connection to God, Chassidic holy songs*,* or *nigunim* (נגונים), are seen to have a unique didactic power, as well. Illustrating this unique educative dimension of *Chassidic* sacred music, Schram cited the following story as told by Rabbi Riskin:

> A simple, uneducated Jew with no great religious learning was invited to a... Sabbath meal. The Rebbe presented a brilliant discourse on the Torah portion of the week, demonstrating his depth of insight and his rare oratorical abilities. "I don't understand," exclaimed the guest, with a puzzled expression on his face. One of the Hasidim then told a story, a wondrous miracle-story. "I still don't understand," whispered the guest, tears beginning to form in his eyes. At length, the assemblage began to sing, a tune of joy and of love, a song of peace and of yearning, a Sabbath melody which captured the desire of a people for God, the rejoicing of a people in its Law. Slowly, the stranger began to lift his voice in song together with the Hasidim, to move his fingers to the rhythm of the music, to join hands with his friends as they rose together to dance. "Now I understand," he declared, with glistening eyes and an open heart.[1]

Moshe had said that singing a *nigun* could clear the throat so that what was learned in the mind could descend to the heart. Yet, this story shows that the *nigun*, rather than aid in a lesson's descent to the heart alone, also acts as a powerful aid to the understanding of the mind. Just as this "simple, uneducated Jew with no religious learning" was enabled to understand the complex messages of the Torah Sages who surrounded him at the table, so, too, could yeshiva students, underscored by this narrative, rely on the power of a *nigun* to facilitate their understanding. In the story, neither the virtue of the human voice, explicit instruction or storytelling were able to aid the poor, uneducated man. Yet where all these failed, singing did not, but enabled both his mind and heart to comprehend the lessons he otherwise may not have understood.

Furthermore, according to *Chassidic* tradition, discovering new melodies for such sacred music is itself considered an extraordinarily holy process. As such, it requires someone with a special attunement to the sacred who can discern and uncover the inherent, dormant sanctity in melodies outside the Jewish tradition. "Singers in the Hasidic 'courts' were always alert to new tunes," Rubin said, fashioning new sacred songs out of "primitive and secular tunes, rhythmic marches of passing military bands, songs of the non-Jewish countryside," including shepherd love songs.[2] As a *chassid* encounters these melodies, his task is to discern which among them has the potential of becoming a sacred melody. "On hearing one of these melodies," Schram explained, "the Hasid has the responsibility of freeing it and of returning the holy spark to God by singing the melody as a holy *nigun*."[3]

One thread of *Chassidic* mysticism tells of how elements of Godliness (or holiness) were shattered in the creation of the universe, and that it was mankind's quest to locate these sacred shards, re-consecrate them, and so return them to their rightful place in the cosmos.[4] Such broken shards of holiness are believed to reside in the secular melodies from which the *nigunim* are written. Such tunes possess an inherent potential for sanctity which remains dormant until awakened by volitional, human intervention. By virtue of the sanctifying process of song, these secular melodies are uplifted to realize their higher purpose as a means of communing with God. In the context of education, such sanctified music has the capacity

---

[1] Schram, *Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another*, 366.
[2] Ruth Rubin, *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979).
[3] Schram, *Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another,* 366.
[4] Zohar 1:4b; *Sha'ar Ha-Gilgulim* 3; *Sefer Ha-Tikunim*; see also Geoffrey W. Dennis, "Kelipot" in *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism* (Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2016), 367.

to enlighten the understanding and allow matters of the mind to descend into the holy recesses of the heart. The role of sacred music as a catalyst for understanding suggests that, by employing consecrated methods in teaching and learning, one may do, experience and become more than would have otherwise been possible had such consecration never taken place. In other words, one facet of the sacred-relationship in this context is that the use of sacred methods can somehow enhance the educative process.

Singing, however, represents only one facet of *Merkaz David's* broader emphasis on physicality in education. Rabbi Kaplan, for instance, often taught how Judaism's emphasis on physicality stood apart from other philosophies, especially in the Western tradition. "Physical reality," he said, "if used for the proper purpose, is the most powerful vehicle to express godliness in this world, and brings about a powerful connection to and revelation of godliness." Apart from just singing, such physical processes weaved their way throughout many of the teaching and learning practices at *Merkaz David*. Not only was their singing loud, boisterous, and physical, but one's involvement in nearly every other aspect of *Merkaz David's* educative process required a similar, intensely physical engagement. Rabbis and *khavrusa* (חברותא) learning pairs would nearly always shout out their lessons, not in anger, but with a sense of mingled passion and urgency to help their listeners understand. Rabbis and disciples alike cantillated the Torah, rather than read it, rocking back and forth as a "candle to the Lord," gesticulating with their hands in an animated attempt to involve both body and spirit—the whole Jewish soul, or *nefesh* (נפש)—in the transmission of sacred Teaching. Even when the Alter Rebbe taught, Moshe explained, he "used to go into a state of ecstasy and sometimes even somersault around the room."

Through hand gestures, rocking back and forth (*shukuling*), cantillating Torah texts, shouting holy arguments (*makhloket*) and singing sacred music (*nigunim*), rabbis and their disciples incorporated elements of the Jewish soul that they shared in common with deity (especially the voice) into the teaching and learning process. By incorporating what are seen as Godly elements of the Jewish soul into their educative practices, those at *Merkaz David* sanctified the process of teaching and learning and were themselves sanctified in doing so. These "soulful" acts were not only a means of connecting to and communing with God on an individual level, but were also a means of connecting to and communing with each other. In the midst of realizing these and other sacred acts, key educative relationships, including those shared between rabbi and disciple and fellow-learners in *khavrusa*, took on a special degree of sanctity themselves, as well.

## *Khavrusa and the Rabbi-Disciple Relationship*

*"It was just such a bond of khavrusa by which those few men that remained at the farbrengen were tied, and the power of that brotherhood was easy to see. Yet, no matter what these men could do for one another in the midst of such a bond, they still needed a teacher. They needed their rabbi, for as it was theirs to learn, so it was his to bring them instruction and guidance."*

In the midst of the eating, singing and dancing that night, many at the *farbrengen* table sat two by two. And though all spoke like old friends, some pairs seemed more like brothers than friends. These were *khavrusa* (חברותא), learning partners who, in the midst of the fiery toil of Torah study, had forged "an attachment and bond that transforms the relationship" beyond the bounds of brotherhood friendship.[1] *Khavrusa* (חברותא), an Aramaic term connoting "friendship," was an ancient learning method of Talmudic scholarship

[1] Song of Songs *Rabba* 2:5, §3; Avraham Schwartzbaum, *The Bamboo Cradle: A Jewish Father's Story* (Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1988), 8.

wherein learning pairs read and discussed texts together,[1] but whose precise origins are more obscure. When I asked Rav Kaplan when *khavrusa* had first begun, he described it as going "as far back as the Mishnah. Once we get to Mishnaic times [from the first and second centuries CE]," he explained, "it's given to *zoog* (זוג), to pairs." The first mention of the *khavrusa* (חברותא) method in Jewish literature is from this very period, when Yehoshua ben Perachia gave the sagely advice, "Make for yourself a rabbi, and acquire for yourself a friend,"[2] or *khavrusa* (חברותא).

Praised as a uniquely powerful catalyst for "generative, textually grounded interpretive discussion,"[3] *khavrusa* stands out as a singular, time-honored example of an "open-ended investigative and conversational approach" to learning.[4] The ancient Talmudic cry of "*o khavrusa o mituta"* (או חברותא או מיתותא)[5], "give me *khavrusa* or give me death," finds a voice in contemporary academic literature in its capacity for generating discussion,[6] fostering self-esteem and building self-confidence.[7] *Khavrusa* is further characterized by its propensity for disagreement, unresolvedness and *makhloket* (מכלוקת), or "holy argument" in which ideas are keenly scrutinized, then alternately supported or further called into question by a learning partner. The didactic effect of this process, Holzer maintains, "may actualize the view that learning occurs through having one's understanding and ideas confronted."[8] Passing through what Davey calls "disruptive experiences,"[9] participants in *khavrusa* pairs are changed not by any conclusive answers they reach, but by the very processes by which they attempt to reach them.

Those at *Merkaz David* showed a fundamental commitment to the truthfulness of what they were studying. Menachem, one of *Merkaz David's* more advanced students, explained the following:

> There's a certain belief that you have in what you are learning—that it is correct. The question is, how am I going to understand it? How am I going to apply it and make sense of it? We believe there is a divine tradition, so, even though something doesn't make sense two, three, four times after learning it, you still go to it again and again to figure it out.

Because any passage's truthfulness was never in question, but only scrutinized as a means to reaching a truth already inherent within it, each half of a learning pair was able to strongly, even vehemently argue their point of view on any passage without the fear of offending the other. "In modern terminology," Rav Kellermann explained, "'sacred' means something that people hold to be very dear, and as such, it's not acceptable to challenge its legitimacy. That concept of sacred is very misleading because, from that perspective, in Judaism, everything is sacred, and nothing is sacred. Everything can be questioned, if the question is meant to lead to a deeper understanding of that very thing." Though truth was considered sacred in this context, it was not treated with quiet reverence. Because of its value, it was considered

---

[1] Elie Holzer, "Welcoming Opposition: Havruta Learning and Montaigne's The Art of Discussion," *Journal of Moral Education* 44, no. 1 (2015): 64-80.
[2] *Pirkei Avot* 1:6; Here, again, the Hebrew term for "friend," *khaver* (חבר), is directly related to *khavrusa* (חברותא).
[3] Orit Kent, "A Theory of Havruta Learning," *Journal of Jewish Education* 76, no. 3 (2010): 1.
[4] Holzer, *Welcoming Opposition: Havruta Learning and Montaigne's The Art of Discussion*, 68.
[5] *Ta'anit* 23a.
[6] Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, *Learning to Teach through Discussion: The Art of Turning the Soul.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
[7] Charles Bingham and Alexander Sidorkin, *No Education Without Relation*, ed. Charles Bingham and Alexander Sidorkin (New York: Peter Lang, 2004).
[8] Holzer, *Welcoming Opposition: Havruta Learning and Montaigne's The Art of Discussion*, 68.
[9] Nicholas Davey, *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006), 7.

worthy of the deepest and most piercing intellectual scrutiny. Inasmuch as such intellectual rigor, interrogation and debate led one to uncover and discern sacred truths, these methods were seen as sacred as they brought those who used them into contact with sanctity itself.

However, the sanctity of the processes of *khavrusa* learning were also contingent upon the manner of their realization. "Every *makhloket* which is for the sake of Heaven," says the Talmud, "will endure. If a *makhloket* is for the sake of Heaven, the desired end is to attain the truth. And a *makhloket* which is not for the sake of Heaven will not endure."[1] Here, the endurance of a *holy argument,* or *makhloket,* is made contingent upon its enactors' intentions being "for the sake of Heaven," or oriented to God and His holiness. If enacted for any other reason, even sacred methods such as *khavrusa* or *makhloket* cannot realize their sacred potentiality. In short, education's sanctity in this context rests not only on *how* it is realized, but *why.*

The effectiveness and endurance which Judaism attributes to *khavrusa's* sanctity is reflected in academic literature. *Khavrusa* learning, says Holzer, involves such a rich dynamic of collaboration, challenging discussion and disagreement that it possesses "the ultimate conviction that learning embedded in such interpersonal interactions will endure."[2] In this sense, although the academy and Judaism disagree as to the origin of *khavrusa* learning's effectiveness, they agree that, if pursued in the proper way, it has the capacity to endure. "All who genuinely seek to learn," said Ferris, "whether atheist or believer, scientist or mystic, are united in having not a faith, but faith itself"[3]—a faith, in this case, that both *makhloket* and *khavrusa* are valuable methodological contributions to the educative endeavor.

The Talmud describes *khavrusa* as a way to refine and sharpen learners through collaborative discussion, just as "a knife can be sharpened only on the side of its friend."[4] To fulfill this purpose, a *khavrusa* pair must have a good relationship with one another. To the question, "Why get yourself a companion [to learn]?" the Talmud answers:

> A man is to get himself a companion who will eat with him, drink with him, read Scripture with him, study Mishnah with him, sleep next to him, and disclose all his secrets to him—secrets of Torah and secrets of worldly matters. Thus, when the two sit and occupy themselves with Torah, if one errs in *halakhah*...his companion will bring him back, as is said, "Two are better than one, in that they have greater benefit from their labor."[5]

More than a means of conducting groupwork, *khavrusa* is to involve nearly every aspect of one's life, from the most mundane to the most personal, that in such closeness the two might be even more uninhibited in their discussion of holy writ, and their pursuit of truth in its pages. Even I had a *khavrusa* who was crucial to my learning; for without his help, the Sages say, I would have simply "become stupid."[6] Of the importance of this paired study, the Talmud warned, "As for your own understanding," it said, "don't depend on it.[7]

In the *khavrusa* relationship, each half of the pair acts as both a giver and receiver, imitating the sacred giver-receiver relationship which, Moshe explained, emanates through the universe, acting as a "back and forth" process in which there is "a light and a vessel—and that vessel in turn becomes a light to pass on to a new vessel." Again, as Menachem described, the purpose of the educative process is not to decide whether the light is real, but

---

[1] see Bertinoro's commentary on *Pirkei Avot* 5:17

[2] Holzer, *Welcoming Opposition: Havruta Learning and Montaigne's The Art of Discussion*, 68.

[3] Timothy Ferris, *The Whole Shebang: A State of the Universe(s) Report* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 312.

[4] Genesis *Rabba* 69:2

[5] see Ecclesiastes 4:9; *Pirkei Avot* 1:6; ARN 8

[6] *B. Ber* 63b.

[7] *Pirkei Avot* 4:15

to come to understand a light already present, though perhaps beyond one's capacity to discern at the outset. "Sometimes he'll do the work," Rav Kaplan explained. "Sometimes you'll be a little bit more passive; sometimes he'll be a little more passive. You're the one guiding him, and he is the one guiding you." By imitating the Divine giving-receiving pattern of the universe, *khavrusa* is seen as being connected to God, and so, in this sense, imbued with a degree of His holiness. But the sanctity of interpersonal relationships in this context extends beyond *khavrusa* to another, perhaps even more fundamentally sacred one, namely, that which is shared between a rabbi and his disciple.

The rabbi, or teacher, in this context, plays a part comparable to the eternal and undiminishing role of Moses, through whom it is believed the generations from Sinai to the present remain connected to God by Teaching's eternal thread.[1] The Talmud repeatedly declares the unique and indispensable role of the teacher in Torah education, saying that one who studied alone was "no match" for one who learned from a teacher.[2] "Provide yourself with a teacher," Gamaliel proclaimed, "and thus remove yourself from doubt."[3] But a teacher could not be just anyone. No, a teacher had to be one possessed of an angelic character. "If the teacher is like an angel of the Lord of hosts," the Talmud said, "Torah should be sought from his mouth; but if not, Torah should not be sought from his mouth."[4] Alternatively translating the term "angel" as "messenger," it could be read that teachers are themselves considered messengers whose teachings are not their own, but instead come from God. Sharing in God's purposes in this way clothes such angelic teachers in a mantle of holiness, both by virtue of the sacred messages they bear as well as the sacred name they represent.

The Talmud also describes rabbis as more than just messengers, but representatives of God Himself. "When a man quarrels with his teacher," says the Talmud, "it is as if he quarreled with God.[5] Being a representative of God implies an exceptional degree of closeness to Him, and so a similarly exceptional degree of holiness, as well. More than a *messenger* of God, Torah's light shines before such a teacher,[6] who becomes a *representative* of and co-teacher with God through his teaching. In representing God, the Source of holiness, a teacher is believed to both transmit and embody holiness.

On the night of the *farbrengen*, when we all stood as the unknown rabbi entered, we weren't reverencing or worshipping him, but Whom he represented and the Torah he embodied. Because of the mantle of holiness each rabbi wears as messenger, representative and co-teacher with God, the reverence due to him is like the reverence usually reserved for God alone. "A disciple of the wise who does not rise before his teacher," says the Talmud, "is called wicked. He will not live long and will forget his studies, for Scripture says, 'It shall not go well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong his days, which are as a shadow, because he feareth not before God.'"[7] Such reverence for one's teacher is indicative of one's reverence for God, whose neglect does not desecrate one's learning in an abstract sense, but is discernibly detrimental to the educative process itself.

The reverence due to one's teacher is so great that it even eclipses that which is to be shown to one's father. "If his father and his teacher are [each] carrying a burden," the Talmud teaches, "he must [first] assist his teacher to lay the burden down and then assist his father. If his father and his teacher are in captivity, he must redeem his teacher [first] and then his

[1] *Pirkei Avot* 1:1
[2] *B. Ket* 111a.
[3] *Pirkei Avot* 1:16
[4] B. MK 17a.
[5] *B. Sanh.* 110a.
[6] see *B. Sot* 21a.
[7] Ecclesiastes 8:13; *B. Kid* 33b.

father.[1] The story is told[2] of a disciple who would never turn his back on his teacher when leaving his presence. When his rabbi wanted to leave, the disciple would put his head down and sit motionless until he was gone. If the disciple wanted to leave, he would walk backward until his heels struck the threshold, when he would know where to exit. So dedicated was he in reverencing his rabbi that, though the rabbi (who was blind) would never see the threshold stained with the blood of his battered heels, he continued his reverential ritual to the day his rabbi died.

Because of his role as both messenger and co-teacher with God, not only is a rabbi accorded a heightened degree of reverence, but his words are highly-regarded, as well. "He who utters something he has not heard from his teacher," says the Talmud, "causes the Divine Presence to depart from Israel."[3] Yet, despite this reverence, both rabbi and disciple reverence God Himself all the more, and find unity despite their distinct roles in a shared orientation toward God as the singular focal point of all their efforts. As Rabbi Markovitz said, "If you're not cognizant of the giving of the Torah, then you're not learning the Torah." In the midst of this shared reverence and awe for God, however, the rabbi's role remains distinct from his disciple's, and the reverence in what Chaim called this "holy relationship" is never cast aside.

Like *khavrusa*, the rabbi-disciple relationship imitates the divine "giver-receiver" pattern of the universe. This relationship, Rav Markovitz explained, is "one of the most famous analogies of the giver and receiver," or the *mashpiah* (משפיע) and *mekabel* (מקבל) relationship. In it, a disciple not only has to reverence his rabbi, but trust him, as well. The disciple-receiver needs such trust, as he places his learning (among his most sacred possessions) in the hands of another. As receiver, the disciple, Rabbi Markovitz explained, also needs to have *bitul* (ביתול), making room to receive what his rabbi would have him learn. As Rabbi Markovitz put it, it is crucial that the receiver "really be a blank slate—to come in and say, 'I forget everything that I know.' That really allows them to be completely in receiving mode for every word the teacher is teaching."

"This pattern," said Moshe, "is always repeated in every part of the universe. There is always a giver and a receiver—a light and a vessel—and that vessel in turn becomes a light to pass on to a new vessel, sometimes even going back and forth, giving and receiving." As an imitation of the "interchange in all things" and the "cosmic energies" within them, as Moshe put it, a rabbi is not merely a messenger carrying Torah's light, but, again, a representative of God and a vessel for that light which, once received in an unbroken line from God Himself, shines within the receiver until the moment he becomes the giver, ready to pass on that light to a new vessel. This process by which the light of Teaching is given and received throughout all generations of time is not only at the heart of the Jewish tradition, but the very embodiment of the sacred in Jewish education. More than anything else, said Moshe, "it is the *process* that is holy."

[1] *B. BM* 33a.
[2] *B. Yoma* 53a.
[3] *B. Ber* 27b

## *Worthiness and Dispositional Consecration*

*"Between two and four in the morning, only those who really wanted to be there, who really wanted to receive the light and knowledge they had been seeking throughout the long hours of each preceding day, still remained."*

"The commandment is a lamp," the Sages say, "and Teaching is light."[1] There is a parable of one who stands in a dark place," they continue. "No sooner does he start walking than he stumbles over a stone or comes to a gutter and falls into it, striking the ground with his face. Why does this happen?" they ask. "Because he has no lamp in his hand. So, too, is the unlearned man who possesses Torah. When he comes upon a transgression, he stumbles into it and dies. But they who study Torah give light wherever they are."[2]

While one of the *farbrengen's* key purposes was to uncover this light from within each participant, that unveiling process had begun long before. According to *Chabad* philosophy, although every human being possesses a soul, the Jewish soul is unique. It has an extra portion given it from heaven, inherently there by virtue of its possessor being an inheritor of the Teaching Covenant. This is the *nefesh elohi*,[3] the Godly soul, and though the divine spark is planted there, it remains dormant until awakened by the actions of its possessor. Studying and living the Teaching, from this perspective, does not change one's nature, but instead awakens something within that nature that has been dormant, yet present all along. The elements of the *farbrengen* ritual (drinking, singing, dancing, eating and staying up late into the night) sought to uncover and unveil this light from within those present and then, bathed in that light, allow them to see more clearly the Source from whence it came.

This awakening of the soul's eternal pilot light, as it were, came about not by teaching and learning in isolation, but by living according to that Teaching. "When a man's good deeds exceed his learning," says the Talmud, "his learning will endure; but when his learning exceeds his good deeds, his learning will not endure."[4] The way in which one conducts one's life, or one's worthiness by righteous living and good deeds, is seen to have the capacity to either enhance or diminish the quality of one's learning. The Talmud compares those who live unworthy of what they teach and learn "to a tree whose branches are many and roots few," so that, when the winds of adversity come, such a person falls."[5] Alternatively, those whose good deeds and worthiness exceeded their learning are like "a tree whose branches are few and whose roots are many, so that even if all the winds in the world come and blow at it, they will not move it from its place."[6] The quality of one's teaching and learning, then, directly depends not just on how one studies, but on how one lives, as well.

Similarly, the man whose righteous practice is proportionate to his Torah learning is like "a man who in building [lays] stones first and then lays bricks [over them], so that however much water may collect at the side of the building, it will not wash away."[7] Without living by the principles one learns and teaches, the Talmud continues, one "immediately softens and crumbles away" even only after "a little rain falls upon it."[8] Yet another passage compares the student who lives what he learns to the "rider of a horse that is bridled. He can turn the horse whichever way he wishes," whereas he who studies Torah without applying it

[1] Proverbs 6:23
[2] Psalms 119:105; Exodus *Rabba* 36:3
[3] see *Tanya*, ch. 1-2
[4] *Pirkei Avot* 3:9
[5] ibid. 3:17
[6] ibid.
[7] ARN 24
[8] ibid.

"is likely to fall and break his neck."[1] Righteous living, then, paired with and informed by one's learning, is foundational, enduring and safe, whereas learning with no intention of living in accordance to the truth uncovered is seen as dangerous, unpredictable and shallow. In short, when learning is separated from becoming, it crumbles; but when linked to one's becoming, it will never fall.

Another Talmudic sage, Rava, stated that the purpose of learning is more about "acting" than "study" alone,[2] in other words, more focused on participation than the acquisition of the information alone.[3] Another sage, Rav Simeon ben Halafta, illustrated this same principle in a parable of two tenants who worked in a king's orchard. The first planted trees throughout the orchard, then, once they had grown to maturity and were about to bear fruit, cut them all down. The second tenant, however, neither planted nor cut down a single tree at any point during his long stewardship over the king's lands. "With whom is the king likely to be angry?" asked Halafta. "Surely," he replied, "with the one who planted the trees and cut them down." The story ends with his incisive interpretation, "So, too, when a man learns precepts of Torah but does not fulfill them, his punishment is more severe than that of him who has not studied at all."[4]

One must not only commit to living by what one learns, but also approach the very process with the correct disposition, intent and attitude. "Woe to those disciples of the wise who occupy themselves with Torah," said Rav Samuel, "but have no fear of Heaven."[5] Those who do not have this special, heavenward disposition, the Talmud says, are like "a treasurer who is entrusted with the inner keys but not with the outer keys."[6] To such learners unconsecrated by their Godly intent, without which one cannot hope to enter into Torah's innermost secrets, the same passage simply asks, "How is he to enter?" Referring to this Godly disposition as "fear of sin," Rav Hoshaia wrote, "Anyone who has knowledge but no fear of sin really has nothing, just as a carpenter without his tools is no carpenter. Why? Because the diadems of Torah are acquired through fear of sin, as Scripture says, 'The fear of the Lord is His treasure.'"[7] In other words, the sacred potentiality of Torah's inner sanctum is only accessible to those whose teaching and learning have been consecrated not only by their worthy acts, but by the consecratory intent and disposition behind those acts. In this frame, the Talmud describes the ideal disciple of Torah:

> The way of a disciple of the wise: humble, meek, eager, full of goodwill, submissive to discourtesy, loved by all people, undemanding even with the people in his own house, fearful of sin, appraising each person according to his deeds, ever saying, "All that is in this world I have no desire for, because this world is not mine." He keeps studying and is ever ready to throw his robe on the ground and sit on it at the feet of other disciples of the wise. And no man ever espies in him anything evil.[8]

Neither related to merit, talent or natural ability, these requirements refer to one's disposition, by which learning is made both acceptable to Heaven and efficacious for the learner. Referring to such dispositional consecration, the author of Proverbs asked, "Of what avail are the fool's means to acquire learning, when there is no heart?"[9]

---

[1] ARN 34
[2] *Berachot* 17a; Psalms 111:10; *B. Ber.* 17a
[3] see Anna Sfard, "On two metaphors for learning and the dangers of choosing just one," *Educational researcher* 27, no. 2 (1998): 4-13.
[4] Deuteronomy *Rabba* 7:4
[5] *B. Yoma* 72b
[6] *B. Shab.* 31b
[7] Isaiah 33:6; Exodus *Rabba* 40:1
[8] DEZ 1
[9] Proverbs 17:16

One key sanctifying disposition at *Merkaz David* was *bitul* (ביתול), or the humility necessary for one to receive what his rabbi would teach. This humble disposition, this willingness to receive,[1] is seen believed to be indispensable to the sanctification of teaching and learning. As with the story of Mordechai who, without sufficient room in the inner vessel to receive the light of Heaven, fell unconscious each Sabbath, only those with a proper disposition heavenward are given inner vessels large enough to receive the Teaching prepared for them. And while one's disposition can open a soul's inner vessels to receive holiness, light and knowledge, diligent study (sanctified by proper motivation) is the principle means by which these vessels can grow in order to accommodate further holiness, light and knowledge in the future. By enabling holiness to enter the inner vessels of one's soul, one's disposition in teaching and learning acts as a catalyst for sanctity.

Importantly, such consecratory intent is not only important during teaching and learning, but must precede the educative act, as well. "Take the shopkeeper as an example," says one Midrashic tale. "When a man comes to buy wine from him, or honey, or oil, or fish brine, the shopkeeper, if he is knowledgeable, first smells the buyer's vessel. If it had been used for wine, he puts wine into it; so, too, if the vessel had been used for oil, for honey, or for fish brine. Likewise," it continues, "the Holy One, when He sees that there is the aroma of wisdom in a man fills him with more.[2] Seeing the consecration of learning as a shared process between God and man, this parable illustrates that God, as the source of sanctity, will only condescend to sanctify one's educative acts provided that a consecratory disposition is already present prior to His involvement. In this sense, just like a vessel's capacity to receive is limited only by its dimensions, so, too, is one's capacity to receive light, knowledge and holiness from God only limited by the consecratory predisposition of one's heart. Herein lies the consecratory power of the human disposition in teaching and learning.

"When a man consecrates himself a little," says the Talmud, "he is made most holy. He who consecrates himself below will be made holy up above. He who consecrates himself in this world will be made holy in the world to come.[3] This consecratory partnership with the Divine is reflected in Judaic teaching and learning, which rely both on one's own efforts as well as the divine intervention of God, neither capable of making an effectual difference to the educative process on its own without the other. Dozens of Talmudic passages make reference to the difference one's disposition and intent make to the process of realizing the commandments of Torah. The contrast is most often drawn between doing something "for the sake or name, of Heaven" (the proper disposition for teaching and learning) or, simply, "not for the sake or name, of Heaven (the improper disposition)." "All of your actions," says the Mishnah, "shall be for the sake of Heaven."[4] Potentially sacred acts[5] (even when performed by holy people[6]) that are realized without such consecratory intent of being are believed to be in vain. Not only are these unable to endure into the eternities, but they are bereft of their connection to God, and so incapable of achieving the holiness inherent within them.

While one's intent has the capacity to consecrate one's actions, not all actions fall within its sanctifying influence. *Chabad* philosophy tells of three impure layers, or *kelipot*, into which the world is divided.[7] The first of these represents that which is inherently and unalterably holy, such as the location of the temple in Jerusalem or the nature of God and the content of His Torah. The third layer is comprised of what is irredeemably evil or unclean,

[1] DEZ 1
[2] *Tanhuma, Va-yak'hel*, §2
[3] *B. Yoma* 39a
[4] *Pirkei Avot* 2:12
[5] see *Pirkei Avot* 5:17
[6] *Yoma 19b.*
[7] *Tanya*, ch. 8, part 3

not to be used or approached under any circumstance. The middle layer, Eliyahu, one of *Merkaz David's* students explained, is filled with things with the dormant potential to be either good or evil, but whose realization is made contingent upon the intent of their enactors. "So, let's say your intellect," Eliyahu said. "Your intellect isn't intrinsically holy, but it can be used for holiness. By using it to connect to God, you turn your intellect into something holy. On the other hand, if you bring it down, and you use your intellect to learn how to do terrible things, then you're lowering your intellect into the third level." Teaching and learning, then, fit squarely within the middle of the three *kelipot,* capable of being either consecrated or desecrated depending on the intent of those who enacted them. "For that to happen," explained Rav Katz, "there has to be an inner shift. There has to be an inner decision or commitment. You have to be engaged, because there is much more to learning in *Chabad* (חב״ד) than the intellectual steps that you're going through."

"By making a blessing on the food, for example," Menachem explained, "that reveals its source and the holy sparks within it that need to be elevated. From this perspective, although everything is essentially God, He puts it in our hands to choose how we use it." So, while human, volitional action is central to the process whereby dormant sanctity is brought to life, that action must be partnered with proper, consecratory intent in order to realize the potential sanctity inherent in all things. "For example," continued Menachem, "Are we going to use it for selfish reasons or for more spiritual ones, connecting it with something higher than itself and us? This is the answer to what is and is not godliness," or holiness. "If the person is more pursuant of spiritual interests," explained Rav Cohen, one of *Merkaz David's* rabbis, "or we could say Godly interests, rather than pursuing materialistic indulgence and satisfaction, they're able to become more sensitive to the godliness that can be discovered by the exercise of studying." Because an inherent yet dormant sanctity lies at the heart of the teaching and learning process, and its sanctification depends not on action alone, but on disposition, as well, that very disposition by which one engages in the educative process is possessed of a sanctifying power, and is, in this sense, sacred itself.

## Summary

This chapter began by focusing on a single educative ritual (the *farbrengen*) in-depth, illustrating through narrative the participatory, spatial and temporal dimensions of holiness. The first themes of the analysis section further explored these very dimensions and how each fit within the conceptual framework of Judaic holiness broadly-conceived, that is, as a connection, proximity and transparency to God, His attributes and actions. Its first themes described how teaching and learning are themselves connected to God (and so made holy by virtue of that connection) through their participatory, spatial and temporal dimensions. Focusing specifically on the participatory and temporal facets of Judaic holiness, the next themes explored how specific teaching and learning methods (storytelling, singing and sacred physicality) are made sacred by their own connection to God's attributes and actions. These themes illustrated both scriptural and contemporary examples of Judaic sanctity as an inherent potentiality, dormant until awakened by human volitional action, properly-oriented to God in accordance with scripture.

The next theme explored this dimension of lived holiness in interpersonal educative relationships. These relationships were shown to possess sanctity in embryo, only realized by proper volition and action, oriented both between participants in such relationships, as well as a shared orientation to God. The chapter's final theme explored how one's worthiness and dispositional orientation toward God affects the sanctity of educative practices and processes in a *yeshiva* context. In all these themes, from the practical, spatial-temporal nature of educative holiness to consecratory methods and dispositions, this chapter illustrated the

relationship between Judaic sanctity and educative acts as dynamic, efficacious, participatory, embodied and, most of all, dependent upon the active involvement of both God and man to realize the full potential of its inherent, though otherwise dormant sanctity.

# CHAPTER FIVE: A WALK IN HOLINESS

*"Instead of sitting me down and explaining it to me, or even recommending a book, we went for a walk where he pointed out people who were living, acting and dressing—all in a holy way. Here was holiness in action—manifest in the ebb and flow of their lived experience."*

My steps fell slow and heavy that morning as I made my way through Jaffa Gate and into the bustling crowds pressing their way up David Street, the ebb and flow of the crowd made all the slower by shopkeepers peddling their wares. But neither the slow-moving crowd nor the shopkeepers' heckling bothered me at all that day.

As I was jostled and shoved amidst the clash of Jerusalem's cross-cultural cacophony, my head hung low with a single thought: when was Rabbi Levi ever going to talk to me? Or, worse, would he ever talk to me at all?

From the moment I had arrived at this new yeshiva, things had been different. At *Merkaz David,* I had been free to go where I pleased, wandering between classes and interviews as though I were just another student.

But at *Or Akiva,* I had been watched from the start—only ever allowed to go to certain classes at specific times, all after waiting weeks for permission. In Jerusalem, memories are long. What would be ancient history anywhere else lived behind every pair of wary eyes that watched me as I walked their hallowed halls each day.

As a non-Jew, my presence amidst these sacred precincts was a rare exception to an age-old precedent that had safeguarded their sacred schools for generations. And though I was, in this rare instance, welcome, I had hardly ever been welcomed by anyone. It was a heavy, lonely feeling.

But Rabbi Levi was different. A short, older gentleman, not yet over sixty, with unkempt hair that protruded from his curly gray whiskers and remarkably bushy eyebrows, rather than from his head, on which there was little or none—while everywhere else I saw only a slight nod or a hasty glance, he would always stop to greet me warmly, call me by name and ask about my research.

Unlike many at *Or Akiva*, he had completed his schooling in Manchester before moving to Jerusalem to attend the Mir, one of the world's most elite yeshivas. Partly because of this, his appreciation for the questions he knew I was asking was of a different sort than most. Rather than being met with suspicion or scrutiny, he not only listened to my questions, but genuinely sought to answer them, as well.

But all this was in passing. He had agreed to an interview, of course (his generosity allowed for nothing less). But his generosity was for all, and the concern it gave him for others, together with the urgency he felt as he passed his living tradition to the next generation, made spare time for an interview nearly a fiction. Every time we planned to meet, I would find him working with a struggling student, speaking animatedly to a captive audience, or praying fervently in a corner, heedless of both clock and calendar.

In those moments, I would catch his gaze just long enough to watch helplessly as he realized he had forgotten, and that I would have to wait yet again. Rescheduling became a matter of

course, and before long, weeks had passed, and still I hadn't spoken to Rav Levi in more than what a few seconds here and there between classes would allow.

And so I dragged my feet through the limestone streets of the Jewish Quarter that day, worn smooth by countless feet before my own, with nothing but the expectation of another failed attempt to occupy my thoughts.

With every step, I found myself further and further removed from the bustling crowds. Tourism, with all its commotion, slowly disappeared, moment by moment giving way to a different Jerusalem—hidden in plain sight.

Souvenirs and shop fronts gave way to flower boxes in window sills as the noise of the city died away, leaving a silence broken here and there by the swish of a broom or the scamper of little feet running home.

At last, I came to the front door. Down the winding stairs and across the hall, I made my way as quickly as I could to where Rav Levi and I had agreed to meet. By then, I was no longer wondering *if* he would say no, only *how*. Would it be another student? An impromptu lecture? A prayer?

Deep in these thoughts, I quickly turned the corner and nearly collided with a man walking just as quickly the other way, scrambling to put on his hat and coat while rushing up the stairs I had only just come down.

It was Rav Levi.

I watched his face as the shock of nearly colliding with me was slowly, agonizingly replaced by a look of wide-eyed, dawning comprehension. What little hope remained in me for our interview vanished in an instant.

I made no pretense of hiding what I felt was my many-times justified frustration. With my gaze fixed on the floor between our feet, I took a feeble breath to tell him that it was alright, and that we had try again another time.

But even as I took that breath, he spoke first.

"Let's go," he said, and sped off down the hall.

As we made our way up the stairs, Rav Levi still hurriedly putting on his hat and coat, my dejected footfall still betrayed my doubt. Where was he taking us? I had little time to think as he began at once to speak with alarming speed about what had only seconds before become our plans.

"My wife says this suit is getting a bit old," he quickly began, "which really means it's become a little too tight 'round the middle." For a moment, I wondered whether I should say something, but he moved on without waiting.

"Don't get me wrong," he said, throwing up his hands. "I'm happy with this suit, of course."

The percussive sounds of our hurried footfall cut through the neighborhood silence as we walked out the door. I sputtered along, trying my best to keep up with a man a fraction of my height and many times my age. “But,” he said, shaking a finger in my face and giving me a swift glance between his glasses and a raised eyebrow, “when your wife tells you it’s time for a new suit...”

Suddenly, he stopped. “Ah!” he said, turning abruptly down a small alley I had never seen before, or at least not thought much of. “Come on!” he shouted, quickly disappearing down the passage. As I plunged in after him, his shouts of “This way, this way” had already begun to echo fainter and fainter along the passage.

I caught up with him as he was halfway up a steep, narrow staircase squeezed between two apartment buildings. As we ducked and dodged through a forest of hanging laundry overhead and children’s toys below, our pace slackened. And whether it was because Rav Levi felt glad we had finally escaped the crowds, or because I had passed some hastily-contrived endurance test designed to find out how badly I wanted answers to my questions, I never found out.

But whatever the reason, his comfort or my persistence, our change in pace brought with it a change in conversation.

“Have you ever been this way before?” he asked.

“I can’t say that I have,” I replied, still catching my breath.

It was only then when I realized that, in the midst of scrambling to keep up with a man many years my senior, I had lost all sense of where I was. And though I feigned a confident demeanor, my stride was only as sure as the footsteps I followed.

Seeing my bewilderment, Rav Levi smirked contentedly. “I’m not surprised,” he said. “There aren’t many who do.”

He let a few more of our footfalls fill the expectant silence.

“It was my own rabbi who taught me this route,” he said, “a long time ago.” A gleam of remembrance flickered in his eye as he said this, as though he could see his younger self shuffling behind another, just as I followed and depended upon him.

“I’ve walked it nearly every day since,” he said.

He stopped walking for a moment and turned to look at me, gazing up at me over his spectacles. “What we spend all day doing in *yeshiva*,” he waved his arm vaguely back down the path, “*that* is holiness.”

“And when we leave, we do all we can to keep it,” he said, “to keep holiness with us until we reach our homes, where holiness can live again.”

“What about in between?” I asked.

His scraggly beard shifted as a sidelong grin spread across his face. Then, shaking a finger about an inch from my nose, he chuckled. "That's the trick, isn't it?" he said. Then, without another word, he turned, descended a few stairs, stepped through an archway, and was gone.

Where before he would have almost certainly sped off, testing my resolve in the pursuit, our pace had slackened to accommodate our discussion. And though I tried to take in our surroundings as we passed them by, I caught only occasional glimpses of familiar streets and shops along the way, quickly engrossed in our conversation.

As we spoke, a thread, invisible to the eyes, but tangible in some other way, seemed to connect the *yeshiva's* sanctity with our conversation—not so much in what we were talking about, but in the very act of talking itself.

"Years ago, my own rabbi taught me this very path," he said, placing a hand gingerly on each of his knees as he slowly climbed another stairway.

"He was worried about safety, of course," said the Rav, "but his main concern was modesty. "The way we dress..." he thought for a moment, pinching his fingers together, looking for just the right words, "How we dress isn't about clothes. It's about who we are."

Nowhere was this more true than in Jerusalem. Anywhere else, how people dressed said something about them, but in Jerusalem, everything you wore spoke volumes—volumes in which you were read, and by which you were understood.

But what was it about modesty, I wondered, that made Rav Levi walk that circuitous path around the city to avoid its desecration?

It wasn't until some time later that I finally began to understand. Several weeks after our walk, I retraced our steps, trying my best to follow the exact twists and turns we had taken from the heart of the Old City into West Jerusalem's Orthodox neighborhoods. When I reached *Mea She'arim* Street just outside Jaffa Gate, I walked into every bookstore I could find, asking the same question:

"*Yesh lekha kama sefarim al kedusha?* (יש לך כמה ספרים על קדושה?)—Do you have any books about holiness?"

Time and time again, the absent-minded voice of another of Jerusalem's disheveled, care-worn bookworms would answer,

"*Lo—ein sefarim k'zeh* (לא. אין ספרים כזה.)—No. We don't have any books about that."

Finally, I arrived at the very last shop on the lane. A little less hopefully, I began the same search for what seemed the hundredth time that day. Standing tip-toe on chairs, crawling on my hands and knees, I scoured the shelves in search of anything about holiness. When I thought I had read them all, I asked the shopkeeper that same, hopeless question:

"*Yesh lekha kama sefarim al kedusha?* (יש לך כמה ספרים על קדושה?)—Do you have any books about holiness?"

He knit his eyebrows. “You might want to look at this,” he said, shuffling off to the back. In my hands, he had placed a two-volume set of brown, leather-bound tomes with gilded letters on a cover that read,

“*Kedushat Einayim* (קדושת עיניים)—Holiness of the eyes.”

As I flipped through its pages, I read the same idea again and again: the eyes had the power to consecrate or desecrate their owners simply by what they saw.

And just like that, I realized why we had chosen that circuitous route through the city.

For all around that labyrinth of meandering backroads lay a Jerusalem entirely unlike the one we had seen, it’s hallowed ground marred by tank tops, flip flops and tourists turned hagglers.

This Jerusalem—one that neither Rav Levi, nor his Rav before him, had ever wanted to see—was one we never encountered on the path we had chosen, meandering through the Old City’s side streets. Turning down one last alleyway, we emerged at last into the sunset just inside Jaffa Gate.

This was the closest we ever came to the worldliness Rav Levi had tried so hard to avoid. At once, I noticed the difference.

But it wasn’t the city that had changed, but my eyes. I had begun to see in a way I hadn’t before. In speaking of holiness, showing me about holiness, and even walking with me in holiness, Rav Levi had opened my eyes to *kedushat einayim* (קדושת עיניים) and shown me holiness itself.

What would otherwise have taken me weeks to tease out of the two leather-bound tomes I would purchase only a short time thence, written in a complicated blend of Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish, was made plain before my very eyes in a single walk of no more than a few minutes.

But at that time, in that place, it made perfect sense. In the Jewish tradition, to walk and talk with the Sages themselves, face to face, just as Moses had done with God at Sinai—just as I was doing in that moment with Rav Levi—was better than a book ever could be.

As I thought of it, the weight of that privilege settled heavily upon my shoulders. Standing in the fading sunlight before Jaffa Gate, I had no idea that, in the short time it had taken us to walk through the Jewish Quarter, I had learned a principle that those two dusty old volumes at the back of a secondhand bookshop would later struggle to say, if they could ever say it at all.

But more valuable than *what* I was learning that day was *how* I learned it.

It was Yohanan Ben Zakkai, the first century rabbi, who said, “If all the heavens were parchment, and all the trees pens, and all the oceans ink, they would not suffice to write down the wisdom which I have learned from my masters, and I took away from them no more than a fly takes from the sea when it bathes.”

Standing there beside Rav Levi in the sunset shadow of Jaffa Gate, his saying took on new meaning. Maybe it wasn't the quantity of what he knew that wouldn't fit in all those books. Maybe, instead, there was something about the quality of what he had learned that could not be written, even if all the heavens, trees and oceans lent their aid in the endeavor.

Perhaps the walk I thought had been prompted by little more than a panicked moment of forgetfulness was possessed of a higher motive. When I had first approached Rav Levi about an interview, he had naturally asked me what I wanted to know.

"Holiness," I had responded, maybe a little more quickly than was polite. "I want to know what holiness means, and what that has to do with teaching and learning."

He agreed to the interview, but something in the way his bespectacled face glanced at me in that moment told me a definition from Written Torah was unfit to answer such a question.

Maybe Rav Levi had taken me on a walk for this very reason. There were some things, perhaps, that no amount of reading could explain, at least, unaided by someone who knew—someone who could teach in a way that the written word alone simply could not. In only a few short moments, all of my reading seemed of little worth compared to a short walk with one who knew, indeed, with one who embodied, Oral Torah. Truly there was, in the Jewish tradition at least, a teaching which resided neither in the reading nor in the writing, but *ba'al peh* (בעל פה), "in the speaking."

Walking briskly through Jaffa Gate toward *HaNevi'im* Street, Rav Levi began again, speaking just as quickly as before, carrying on in a sea of tangents like why his friends wouldn't wear neckties or how hard it was to find a Diet Coke in the Holy City.

"Now, there's a story," he said, suddenly returning to our topic without losing a beat, "a very famous story about the *Chazon Ish*." I looked up, cautiously curious about where this next tale would take us. "He was a very famous rabbi," he continued, "and the story is of how he saved a man's life."

*Go on*, I thought.

"It all began when one of his students was going to have brain surgery," he said. "The *Chazon Ish* handed him a note to give the doctor. On it was scribbled a hasty drawing of a brain, with Hebrew letters and arrows scrawled all around it."

He paused a moment before going on. "He told his friend to have the doctor follow the instructions on the paper, and promised him that everything would be fine."

My expression, even my body language, went from patient endurance to rapt attention.

"The man survived the surgery, and only just passed away a few years ago. It was in the papers, and they showed a picture of the sketch that the *Chazon Ish* had done. To this day, many say it was because of what the *Chazon Ish* had told the doctor that the man survived what was a very dangerous procedure."

I’ve since found the article he was talking about, and the story is very well-known within his community. There was a man called the *Chazon Ish*, and even a drawing like the one Rav Levi had spoken of.

“Nobody knows how the *Chazon Ish* knew anything about brain surgery,” he continued, “though it is known that he definitely didn’t go to medical school. Now, it’s possible that he studied medicine in secret, but it’s generally accepted that this was an example of *sod hashem layiRav* (סוד השם ליראיו)—those who fear God just know, like a prophet.”

I listened more intently than ever.

Did he really mean that a rabbi from his community had learned how to do brain surgery by prophecy? Excitement filled my mind. Surely holiness had something to do with it. But what did he mean by prophecy? I thought.

“What is prophecy?” asked Rav Levi, anticipating what had been my question, but that then was ours.

“Prophecy isn’t just a message from Heaven, like when God told Isaiah, ‘Go tell the Jews to behave,’ or something like that. That’s not really prophecy.”

He delved into the words of the Sages.

“Maimonides taught that prophecy was a connection, a certain level beyond the limits of normal human intelligence. Nachmanides agreed, describing Aristotle as the greatest mind that humanity ever knew *without prophecy.”*

We stopped to wait for the light rail before crossing the street. As we watched our shaky reflections on its smooth, metallic surface as it passed by, turning slowly down the street on its way to Damascus Gate, it struck me as odd that an Oxford researcher and a Jerusalemite rabbi would have to wait for something so modern and time-bound while speaking of something that seemed so ancient and timeless.

“Once you’re a prophet,” he went on, walking boldly on when the train had passed, “there’s a whole new understanding of reality, because, for once, you *really understand.”*

“It’s like I told you before about the electrons,” he said, recalling a conversation that I honestly couldn’t remember. “You don’t know things because you studied them in a book or because you researched it. You know them simply because you’re in tune with God, and God knows everything.”

“When you have that hotline to God,” he continued, “you understand things, just because you understand them. And that, in a way, is how God understands things. He didn’t learn it or study it. He just *understands* it.”

Now I was confused. Learning was so central to the Jewish faith. It was everything. *Kaneged kulam* (כנגד כולם) they had called it—equal to all the other commandments combined. But now he was saying that there was a way to understand without learning?

He had my undivided attention.

“So, the *Chazon Ish* understood how a brain works not because he saw it in some Talmudic something, though some say he did. But I think that he was just in tune to reality—to things as they really are.”

“If you connect with or draw near to God,” he went on, “you begin to see the world—including everything and everyone in it—the way He does, through His eyes, so to speak. There is, in short, a change in you. You become able to see.”

“So,” he continued, “again, even in physics, the more *holiness* you have, the more you are on a level to *really understand* how things work.”

He paused again, then added in a melancholy tone, suddenly interested in the ground at his feet, “But we don’t study physics like that.”

Only moments before, when he had explained how education’s sanctity didn’t come from its content, but from the process by which it was brought to life, it had been a sweeping, universal statement. It had suddenly become more personal.

Did he wish things could be different?

I didn’t have time to ask.

“But Torah...” he said, his voice becoming louder even as he said the word, “Torah is different. Torah, by its nature, is divine.”

By now, we had left the Old City far behind, and every step drew us closer to Rav Levi’s home and family.

It was a neighborhood many considered the beating heart of ultra-Orthodoxy on earth. If there were a place you could find holiness by walking around in search of it, this was it.

“There is a level of Torah that’s superficial, though,” he said, quickly flipping the argument. “So, you’re telling me that the Bible that they teach in, wherever it is, university, is divine? That’s just a translation. What makes *that* divine?”

Apart from how strange it was to hear someone forget the word “university,” calling it instead “*wherever it is*,” what he said seemed crucial. Just because Torah was inherently holy didn’t make teaching and learning it inherently holy, too.

This was new.

I had always imagined, from what I had read and heard in interviews until then, that Torah’s sanctity had something like a Midas’ touch: whatever it touched became holy, like it was contagious. But Rav Levi thought otherwise.

“On that level of understanding, it doesn’t make any difference who you teach or who you are. You can still read Torah and remember all the kings of Persia, and all the kings of whatever, or how many years someone was there, but *will you get what it’s trying to say?*”

He reminded me of a conversation we had had earlier that very day in his lesson back at *yeshiva.* We had talked about how scholars had found inconsistencies in the Biblical story of Esther.

“This,” said the Rav, “in my mind, is as far from Torah as you can get.”

No matter the academic rigor behind such scholarship, to him, there seemed to be something missing.

“Without *kedusha* (קדושה),” he said, “that’s exactly what you get. Without holiness, you only get what’s written down. But we’re not talking about that. We’re trying to teach something *real:* we’re trying to teach the *real Torah*.”

We walked up a long stretch of road whose incline hadn’t let up since we had left the Old City. It made for hard work, especially as each of us—he in black wool and I in blue tweed—made the journey wearing suits and ties in the hot afternoon sun.

“How can you teach God’s Torah?” he suddenly asked, throwing his hands up. “How could you possibly do that? It’s really an exercise in futility,” he said, turning to look at me, “because we’re not divine.”

“Futility?” I thought. How had we come from the reality of holiness to its impossibility?

“How could you possibly relate to such things?” he asked, his tone growing more intense every moment. He had spoken this last phrase as if he were speaking to himself, stooped under the burden of his heavy questions.

He turned to look at me and, shaking off the daydream of his self-interrogation, said, “It’s like, you know those transformer things you plug into the wall?”

I nodded.

“We’ve got the wrong voltage!” he cried, his eyes alight with the hope that I had finally begun to understand. “How could you possibly connect with it? You’re just going to”—he flicked and spread all his fingers as wide as they would go just in front of my face—“poof! It’s just going to blow up, you understand?”

Moving his explosive hands away from me, he rubbed them together. Having found the perfect metaphor for the holiness of Torah, his mind began to race.

“So, to the extent that you’re in tune, that you live a life of holiness—in other words, to the extent that *you are divine*,” he gave these last words special emphasis, “you can both absorb divine teaching and pass it on *in a divine way*.”

In teaching, it seemed, the “who” and the “how” were inherently linked.

“Not only do you have to be holy to teach in a sacred way,” he went on. “You must insist that those you teach be holy, as well.”

"Otherwise, it's a waste of time. It would be like pouring water down a drain, or into a bucket with no bottom. Why would a teacher put forth the effort, if his student wasn't ready to commit to holiness?"

He spoke of those who, born in secular Jewish families, later chose to become religious or, as Rav Levi called it, *lakhzor le t'shuvah* (לחזור לתשובה), "to return to the Answer." Those who made the journey, he said, were called *ba'alei t'shuvah* (בעלי תשובה), "possessors of the Answer."

But neither ritual, rite nor any other outward sign or symbol could do this. No, the Answer was much simpler than that. It was by nothing less than study—study sanctified by a life committed to holiness. That was enough to change you, even sanctify you, by virtue of your efforts together with the sanctifying approval of Heaven. This was education's sanctity: from earth to Heaven, on the one hand, and Heaven to earth, on the other.

"Hello! Rav David!" shouted Rav Levi, waking me abruptly from some of that afternoon's deepest contemplations.

On the other side of the street walked another of the rabbis who taught at the *yeshiva*, no doubt headed home as we were.

"See that rabbi?" Rav Levi asked me. "He's walking without his glasses on because he doesn't want to be distracted. Seeing what's out here would dilute his vision. I'm sure that's the reason."

"Hello, Rav David!" he shouted again. He hadn't heard us the first time and, as he couldn't see very well, returned the greeting by waving in the wrong direction.

"We're talking about *shmiras einayim* (שמירת עיניים – 'guarding the eyes')," Rav Levi called to his friend. Rav David nodded, quickly returning his intense focus back on the sidewalk.

I watched as this rabbi, reverenced and honored by his students as well as his peers, struggled, half-blind, to make his way down the road.

Why was it so important that he not see the world around him on his homeward journey?

Sensing my confusion, Rav Levi did his best to explain.

Rav David, he said, didn't want to be distracted from the holiness that he had built since early that morning back at the *yeshiva*.

To struggle blindly home wasn't a scriptural injunction, but a private form of intense devotion, followed to ensure that the sanctity he had won would not be lost in transit from one sanctum (the *yeshiva*) to the next (his home). Though he may not have seen the world around him, without his glasses, he could see holiness all the clearer.

Before long, Rav David had disappeared down one of many side streets that now branched from the main road. I quietly wished the man well, still a little worried that he wouldn't make it home safely.

“Oh, don’t worry about him,” Rav Levi assured me, noticing my concern. “He does this all the time. He’ll be fine.”

Just then, we passed a large, weather-beaten sign that warned residents of the dangers of the internet. Rav Levi immediately pointed it out, telling me in great detail about how he only ever used his home computer for email, and even then felt unsafe. The home, he explained, was one of the few places where holiness could thrive, free from the profane grip by which the world outside found itself every day more tightly squeezed.

As we walked, Rav Levi drew my attention to people here and there whose behavior he needed me to see: families of giggling children, wizened old Sages shuffling about, and women covered from head to foot in black, their eyes their only visible feature.

It was only then that I realized what he was doing.

When I asked him about holiness weeks ago, I had expected him to point me to a book. After so much time searching Oxford’s libraries, I had assumed the answer would be something I could read.

But Rav Levi had other plans.

Along the way, he pointed not to definitions of holiness written in the endless tomes of Jewish scripture, but to holiness in people—people we saw as we walked through the everyday comings and goings of Rav Levi’s neighborhood.

And as I walked beside him, I began to understand. I had seen living holiness firsthand in the lives of those who lived it. This holiness was a way of life, not a dictionary definition. Perhaps this was what had given scholars such a hard time. Maybe it wasn’t meant to be defined at all, neatly placed in the delimiting box of what it was and what it wasn’t. Maybe it, perhaps, could only be understood by living it, or at least seeing it lived firsthand.

“There’s something else,” said Rav Levi as we started climbing another hill, slowing our pace.

“Every time we do a ritual or keep a commandment,” he explained, “we say a blessing beforehand. Each version is a little different, but they all share one phrase:”

*baruch ata Adonai eloheinu meleck ha’olam asher kidshanu b’mitsvotav...*

ברוך אתה יהוה אלוהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו...

Blessed art Thou, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments

“What does it say?” he asked. “He who sanctified us *how?*”

He paused.

“Through His commandments,” he answered. “He sanctifies us *by the things that we do*.”

“So,” he went on, “you want to eat a meal on the Sabbath? *That* is holiness!”

"Now, how could that possibly be holiness?" he asked. He had again made himself the questioner, placing himself in my shoes to better understand how to answer the questions that he guessed—and was almost always right in guessing—I was about to ask anyway.

"It is holy because God has told us that it is so. Of all the definitions of holiness, for us, that is the most simple; that is the most clear. But, more to the point, we do these things, and in doing them, we are sanctified."

He was telling me again, in *khazarah* (חזרה), the Jewish method of returning over and over to the same point from different angles, how holiness was all about acting. Judaic holiness, he kept reminding me, was alive—not a theory, but a way of living embedded in the ebb and flow of daily experience.

"You know, most people go their whole lives without ever making a conscious decision, or *b'khirah* (בחירה)," he said.

"Most people have only ever done whatever was easiest or tastiest or cheapest. They've never had to choose between what is right and what is wrong, even though it wasn't easy, or tasty or cheap."

We stopped to let a car go by.

"But the person who keeps Torah? He does it all the time. Thousands of times every day, he's choosing to do what is right."

Holiness, then, was about more than action. It was about agency, too.

The choice to live according to Torah had a sanctifying power that worked in tandem with the holiness that emanated from God. Rav Levi was once again painting a picture of holiness that worked in two directions, just like the electric transformers he had mentioned before.

Mankind had to make a choice: plug into God's holiness by living according to His laws, or stay unplugged, alone. If they chose to plug in, they would be connected to God who, as the source of holiness itself, could sanctify them and their actions, including teaching and learning. If they didn't plug in, teaching and learning would happen, of course, but they would remain untouched by the sanctifying hand of Heaven.

In this way, holiness was a two-way street: God on one side, human agency on the other. Without the other, each was only sanctity in embryo—dormant until the two met, the hand of human agency reaching out to God's, to realize in their meeting the primary efficacious condition of holiness.

We had been walking for some time, and I began to worry that we had run out of time before I could ask him my question. I decided it was now or never.

"Um, R-Rabbi," I blurted out, realizing this was the first thing I had said since we left the Old City, "If teaching is a commandment, and commandments sanctify us, can we be sanctified by teaching?"

The words I had been waiting to say for so long, when they finally came out, sounded a little over-eager, even to me. I took a deep breath, half-expecting some vague answer or long-winded story only somewhat related to my question. Instead, his answer was simple.

"Most certainly," he said. "It's a very spiritual act. It's seen as a great commandment."

Between the glasses at the tip of his nose and his raised, bushy eyebrows, his eyes seemed to say, "It's okay, ask me another."

So, I began, less hesitant than before. "Traditional Jewish teaching methods like *khavrusa* or reading aloud, for instance," I asked, "are these utilitarian, or are they holy? Do you preserve these methods because they work, or because there's something more going on—because they're holy?"

He gave me a look then that was unmistakable. Peering at me through squinted eyes, his beard crinkled into a half smile. Taking his hands from behind his back, he shook a finger in my face.

"Now *that*," he said, "is a fascinating question."

Then he began not to tell me an answer, but to show me one by living it.

He started speaking aloud to himself, as though I, together with the rest of the world, had melted away, leaving Rav Levi alone with his thoughts. With an intensity and vigor that spoke volumes, he questioned himself relentlessly, reveling in the challenge of a question finally worth his mettle.

This was Talmudic reasoning at its best, what Rabbis simply called "talking it out." I had seen it before (it was used almost constantly at *yeshiva*), only this time I was the sole beneficiary of a process that, until that moment, I had only ever seen from afar, addressing questions not entirely my own.

But this was different. By answering *my* question, as he had dozens of times on this walk alone, he placed himself in my shoes and chose to approach the question from the perspective of the questioner—from my perspective. Rather than give a pre-packaged answer of his own, scalably suited to a wide audience, he customized the answer to the needs and perspectives of the one who asked it: in this case, to me.

"We went over this today in class," he said, "when we talked about how one who is proud is also forgetful."

"Is it just utilitarian," he asked, speaking again more to himself than to me, "because proud people just aren't interested in what others have to say? Or is there more to it than that?"

He paused to consider the question he had just asked himself. I stood by, watching him grapple as my question became every moment more his own.

"Well, we proved that it was more than that," he said, stroking his beard, "because it also talks about forgetting what you've learnt. So, it's one thing to say that a proud person can't

learn, but why would he forget what he's already learnt? That's what you mean. There's something spiritual about this thing. It's not just practical. There's more to it than that."

Here, he stopped and, almost checking himself, slowed both his footfall and speech.

"You know," he said, a little more deliberately than before, "I haven't really considered this question. I need to think about it."

This was his method. He had stepped so deeply into my question that his perspective had become one with my own, the wisdom of his experience weaving itself into the fabric of my novice longing for an answer.

Though I wanted this question answered with all the weight of the years I had spent in search of it, perhaps the only person in the world who wanted it more than I did stood, in that very moment, right beside me, dedicating all his energy to pursuing the matter to its conclusion, or better yet, to his satisfaction.

"You really have to search and ask yourself, 'Are these methods inherent, or are they inherited?'" he said. "If you could find out if this is how it's always been done, that would tell you whether it's utilitarian or not."

He continued the dialogue with himself, "*I've* always taught that it was utilitarian. It's just a great way of doing things..."

His voice trailed off, still clearly speaking to himself and not to me at all.

"But is there something deeper than that? Maybe there is..."

Suddenly, he chopped the air with both of his hands, rigid and parallel, first to the left, "You're connected to your teacher," then to the middle, "who connects you to Moses," then finally to the right, "who connects you to God."

"So, in that sense," he went on, replacing his hands behind his back, "teaching is a fire that has gone on for ages, continually emanating from Mt. Sinai to this very moment."

He had spoken those last words most slowly of all, almost in a whisper.

*To this very moment.*

"Sometimes," he continued, "the Talmud calls someone a 'Moses' simply because he was a great teacher, even though it wasn't even his name to begin with."

"You call a teacher a 'Moses' because of what you see in him, because of *who* you see in him. That connection to Moses is more than the chain of generations that links them together. No, it's as though in him and in his teaching you see the ancient countenance of Moses again on the earth, manifesting itself in the sanctity of teaching."

Like Moses' countenance, the giving of Torah at Sinai drew ever closer to the present. And so, the past, with all its patriarchs and promises, was made ever more present by the power of this lived remembrance, without which it would quietly but inescapably fade.

That connection certainly seemed more mystical than utilitarian. Ordinary teaching might change a person, but this—a change where the character and power of an ancient, archetypal prophet-pedagogue could manifest itself in and through a living person in the present day—how could something utilitarian be so extraordinary?

"But I don't know whether the methods we use are holy," he confessed. "Take *khavrusa,* for instance. Has it always been that way? I don't know of any tradition that says that Moses' students learned in *khavrusa*. In that case, it must have become part of the tradition later on, which makes me think that it's more of a question of what works, than what's been given by God from the beginning."

But did a method's sanctity depend on its being unchanged from the beginning? Was there no room for fresh sanctity in the thousands of years since Sinai?

"We definitely have respect for books," he said. "We kiss them when they fall on the floor, we don't leave them lying about like a magazine, but that's just respect. I mean, no matter what you want to learn, the more respect you give it, the more likely you are to remember what you study. That's utilitarian!"

"We don't show books respect because of some inherent holiness printed on their pages. You kiss them and you love them because you know what they're going to do for you. They're going to build you. They're going to draw you closer to God. It's about what books do, not about what they are, that makes us respect them as holy."

So, were books holy, or just utilitarian? The line between holiness and utility was becoming more blurry by the moment. *Holy books were holy because of what they did, not because of what they were?* I still didn't understand what he meant, but for the first time, the idea was planted in my mind that efficacy and *sanctity* were connected.

He continued asking himself questions about teaching methods, considering each one in turn.

"*Khazara* (חזרה), the method of repeating something over and over again, I would have guessed was utilitarian," he said. "I'm sure enough people have seen it work, whether in Torah study or otherwise. I mean, I used to learn my physics that way."

"When I was a teenager in Manchester," he mused, "I wanted to finish my schooling and study in *yeshiva* as quickly as I could. So, I got myself a *khavrusa* partner and repeated our lessons, in *khazara* (חזרה), over and over until we understood them."

He smiled, "In the end, we finished six months earlier than anyone else in our class."

"But," he said, "looking back on that experience, it's hard to see that there's something holy about the methods we used. Of course, we don't like to change things, because you never know whether a new method will have that same dimension. That's exactly your point, isn't it? Is it utilitarian, or is there something else going on? In that regard, our attitude is different from the rest of the world. If something works, our take is, 'Stop messing around trying to change it!'"

“It may be that something else will work out better..., *maybe*, but the burden of proof isn’t on us. We’ve been doing this for thousands of years. Even without sanctity, which is another thing altogether, there’s something valuable in the way we do things that can’t just be replaced without a second thought. Our methods are important. *How we do things is important*.”

He paused to consider a moment.

“In short, I would say this: the question isn’t whether our methods are utilitarian or sacred. It’s *both*, don’t you see? Our methods haven’t been sanctified despite the fact that they work. They’re sanctified *because* they work.”

I let that sink in. At last, he had arrived at the answer he and I had given so much to pursue.

“Our methods are sanctifying,” he said, “as we are sanctified by them— not so much because of what the outcome would be, but more because of what the process would mean for who we would become in its fulfilment.”

I would have stopped walking that very instant for how surprised I was, but we had already stopped without me ever noticing.

I would have asked him more questions, too, but even if there’d been more time, I wouldn’t have been able to think of any. My mind was overflowing with the implications of what he had just said. But before I could give it any more thought, he woke me from my musings with a start when he shouted,

“Hi, there!”

Startled, I looked up at a woman standing only a few yards ahead of us, who he quickly introduced as his wife. Behind her was a shop whose sign read “Tailor.” I had almost completely forgotten why we had come this way in the first place. Rav Levi’s wife had asked him to pick out a new suit.

It seemed strange to me that, with a destination as everyday as this, we had talked about something so profound along the way.

His wife smiled and greeted me as cordially as he had always done. I couldn’t help but notice how happy they seemed as they made small talk with each other at the end of what must have been quite a long day for them both. It was Sunday in Jerusalem, and in the Jewish calendar, that meant the first day of the work week, with nothing but more work left in sight.

Before too long, they said goodbye and disappeared into the shop, leaving me alone in the middle of *Mea She’arim* with my thoughts. Groups of *yeshiva* students crowded around their rabbis, straining to hear the lessons that couldn’t wait until they had reached their destinations. Jewish mothers shuffled past with four or five children in tow, rushing to finish their shopping before heading home for the evening.

And there I was, standing still as stone as the hustle and bustle of holiness passed me by on every side. My Rabbi had gone, and I was still reeling from what he had told me.

*Our methods are sanctified because they've worked,* he had said.

*Their sanctity and utility are one.*

## *Or Akiva*: The *Yeshiva*

*Or Akiva's* main entrance, which was open to the public, led into a sprawling atrium, the marble floors underfoot and ornate chandeliers overhead only outmatched by the enormous windows on the far wall that looked out over the Western Wall. However, the *yeshiva* itself was not in such peaceful precincts. Up a narrow staircase and around a corner just beside the main entrance to the *yeshiva's* public atrium was an inconspicuous side-door, kept perpetually locked, only to be entered by those who were there not to visit, but to study. After entering the proper code, passing an armed guard and descending several flights of stairs, one arrived at last at the *beis midrash* (בית מדרש) where well over a hundred students could be found studying at all hours of the day. More striking than the vaulted ceilings or the thousands of books that lined nearly every square inch of wall space, however, was the noise. From just before dawn until well after dusk, a sea of sound filled the air, the arguments of rabbis, disciples and *khavrusa* pairs mingling with sung and spoken prayers. In rooms nearby, classes met to meticulously study the passages their rabbis had given them, the sounds of their debates joining in the cacophony that endlessly echoed through the vaulted halls of the main chamber below.

Yet, unlike *Merkaz David's Chassidic* background, *Or Akiva's* Lithuanian heritage focused its teaching and learning more on the intellectual processes of Talmudic scholarship than their spiritual or devotional dimensions. Following such figures as the Vilna Gaon and Rav Chaim of Volozhin, rabbis and students at *Or Akiva* adhered to the Talmudic mandate to study *torah lishmah* (תורה לשמה), teaching and learning Torah for no other reason than to be involved in the process. As such, experiences like singing *Nigun Shamil* with Moshe at *Merkaz David,* closing our eyes and swaying to the music, were altogether foreign here. In this context, the peak educative experiences for many at *Or Akiva* were of an intellectual sort. Even their rituals (like the *maimars*[1] of Rav Rivlin) were focused on the revelation of some transcendent scholarly truth through a dazzling array of rational reasonings, rather than the devotional singing, dancing and drinking of the *Chabadnik farbrengens* at *Merkaz David.* Far from limiting the sanctity of the teaching and learning process, however, this focus on the intellectual rigor of Torah study illuminated dimensions of the sacred-education relationship unexplored elsewhere.

## Themes

This chapter's narrative highlighted a single interview, giving the reader a strong foundation for this chapter's analysis and an in-depth look into how interviews were conducted throughout the study. The first theme, "Living Remembrance," describes teaching and learning as a sanctified vehicle for Judaic remembrance. "Consecratory Purpose and Eternity" highlights the endless scope of the learning process as one of its sacred characteristics. The next two themes examine the human elements of the sacred-education relationship. "Sanctification by Functionality," describes the overarching, transformative purpose of Jewish education, while "Sanctity through Orality," explores a single, scripturally-prescribed method (physical speech) within that frame. Focusing on the participatory dimension of education's sanctity, "Purposive Difficulty" describes how education's inherent

[1] A *maimar* was *Or Akiva's* version of a *farbrengen.*

difficulty can sanctify those who bring it about. Finally, "Imitatio Dei" describes teaching and learning as a never-ending process of *imitatio dei,* whereby teachers and learners may become like God in their personal character as well as their educative capacities specifically.

## *Living Remembrance*

*As Moses' countenance was manifest in the Moses-teachers of today, so, too, the moment of matan Torah (מתן תורה), the 'giving of the Torah', drew ever closer to the present. And so the past, its patriarchs and promises were made ever more present by the power of this living remembrance, without which it would, from a Jewish perspective, at least, certainly fade.*

I once had the privilege of meeting one such modern-day Moses in the personage of Rabbi Berkowitz, head of *Or Akiva*. A large, rather imposing figure, what he lacked in height he made up for in broad shoulders and a brusque visage. But his penetrating gaze belied a jolly demeanor, one whose kindness led us to a moment when, sitting across from each other, we spoke openly of my questions. When I asked about holiness and the purpose of Teaching, it took some time before he offered a reply. Leaning back in a rickety old chair, he propped his feet up on the only bit of desk not strewn about with stacks of books and paper, the silence broken only by the sharp hiss that shot from the can of Coke he had just opened. After he had sipped thoughtfully for a minute or two, he told me a story in answer.

More than a hundred years ago, he began, a small community of Jews was expelled from its home. Those who came to evict them said they could take only one thing with them each. While many rushed inside in search of heirlooms to remember or valuables to sell, the village rabbi stood in thoughtful silence, waiting. Emerging from their homes and brandishing their singular treasures, they watched from their doorways as the old Rav walked into the tiny synagogue they had almost already forgotten. He, and he alone, had thought first not of his own life, but of theirs.

Surely, some whispered, he would bring the Torah scroll. It was all they would need to start over in a new land, living among yet another people. Nonsense, others murmured, he would bring the whole *Tanakh* (תנ"ך)—it had the Torah, the prophets and the writings. Surely it was the better choice. But all their guesses fell to silence when they saw his wizened figure appear at the synagogue's threshold. In the dim light, as the soldiers marshalled them down the road, they could only just discern, held in earnest under one shaky arm, a single, thin volume, no more than several dozen pages at most, unadorned by any marking that would have told them what lay inside. Then, stepping close to the Rav, one bold villager saw at last what he had chosen. Neither the Torah scroll, nor the *Tanakh* (תנ"ך), it was, instead, a record, meticulously kept, of the Jewish calendar. As a wide-eyed look of disbelief spread across the villager's face, the Rav took pity on him. "The written word," he said, "whether in Torah or any other part of Jewish scripture, might have helped us know what to read. But the calendar," he lifted it ever so slightly, "the calendar will help us remember how to live. In reading we may know in part, but in living we remember, and know in full."

Embedded in the rabbi's choice, I later learned, was a lesson of profound significance for teaching and learning. Of all the old rabbi could have taken with him—from ancient scrolls to sacred relics—he had chosen a calendar, and in so doing had picked the only physical object in the room that reached beyond the immediacy of the present and into the eternal. To help his people remember, it would not rely on the supposed permanence in any written record, but by his people living out a process of perennially-renewed, living remembrance. For by it, he knew, they wouldn't just recall covenants made by distant ancestors out of a remote past. Instead, armed with such a calendar, they would make those covenants anew themselves, and do so with the same efficacy and sanctity that defined the first giving of Torah at Sinai millennia before.

Such remembrance is at the very heart of Judaism, and remains one of the key purposes behind its myriad commandments, teaching and learning not least among them. “Remembering is a noble and necessary act,” said Elie Wiesel. “The call of memory, the call *to* memory, reaches us from the very dawn of history. No commandment figures so frequently, so insistently, in the Bible.”[1] Throughout the Talmud, Sages tirelessly extol the merits of remembrance (an attribute most often given to God), just as they relentlessly condemn the dangers of forgetting (a primarily human trait).[2] The same scriptural tradition which, in one breath, raises its voice to declare, “And God remembered His covenant with Abraham,”[3] proclaims in another, “When a man forgets a single word of what he has studied, Scripture deems it as though he had forfeited his life.”[4] Yet, as one of the central facets of the covenant relationship between them, Hebrew scripture “demands that not only Israel must ‘remember,’ but God as well.”[5] In short, remembrance is incumbent upon both God and man.

With the understanding that Judaic holiness is defined by God’s actions, when scripture repeatedly describes God as one who remembers, it infers that remembrance is a holy act. Furthermore, this sort of remembrance is not static, but participatory. The Hebrew root *zakhar* (ז-כ-ר, “to remember”), for instance, appears in scripture far more often in an active sense than in a static one.[6] In his lexical analysis of the same root, Childs maintains that it’s essentially action-oriented meaning is one of contemporary encounter between God and man, both engaged in the meaningful act of remembering, though each in their own way.[7]

Yerushalmi (2011) maintains that this orientation to action in Jewish remembrance, far from being just another manifestation of Judaism’s orthopractic nature, embodies a core tenet of Judeo-Semitic epistemology. “Memory,” he maintains, “is transmitted more actively through ritual than through chronicle.”[8] Seen in this light, the participatory nature of Judaic remembrance brings a subjective, personal dimension to knowledge. In a Judaic sense, then, knowledge cannot be divorced from the meaningful act of remembrance. “Only in Israel,” wrote Yerushalmi, “and nowhere else is the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. Its reverberations are everywhere...“*Remember* the days of old (Deut. 32:7). “*Remember* these things...O Israel, *never forget* Me” (Isaiah 44:21)...And, with a hammering insistence, “*Remember* that you were a slave in Egypt...”[9] Yet, how is such remembrance to be accomplished? And is it considered holy when realized by man?

One answer to these questions lies in the lived reenactment of seminal, sacred moments from collective Jewish memory. One of the most powerful of these is the primordial pedagogic act at Sinai, ritually renewed in present-day teaching encounters that imitate how God taught Moses on that occasion. The purpose of such ritual remembrance transcends the

---

[1] Elie Wiesel, *Hope, Despair and Memory*, Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1986.
[2] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996), 119; Among exegetes who note possible exceptions to this statement, explaining that even God has the capacity to both remember and forget, Yerushalmi, for example, explains, “Indeed, He [God] can be challenged and even upbraided for having ‘forgotten’; for a particularly vivid example of this, see Psalm 44.”
[3] see Exodus 2:24.
[4] see *Pirkei Avot* 3:8.
[5] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, 119.
[6] Estimates of its verbal manifestations range from 169 instances (Yerushalmi) to 228 (see Beth Kissileff, “Judaism: The World’s Best Memory Palace,” *Moment Magazine,* September/October (2012), 26.) in total throughout the *Tanakh* (תנ"ך), of Hebrew Bible, while its substantive forms are estimated to only appear 23 times in the case of *zekher* (זכר), “remembrance,” and 24 times in the case of *zikaron* (זיכרון), or “memory.”
[7] Brevard Childs, *Memory and tradition in Israel* (London: SCM Press, 1962).
[8] Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory,* xvii.
[9] ibid., 10.

representationalism of factual recall,[1] embodying, instead, a process of renewal whereby sacred theophanies of the past become sacramental hierophanies in the present. In depicting God as having asked His people to "remember" and "observe" in a single utterance (something, says the Talmud, "beyond the human mouth to articulate or the human ear to absorb"[2]), Jewish scripture illustrates remembrance not as a cerebral exercise, but as a fully embodied, participatory ritual[3]—one that has the power to re-live sacred moments with the same efficacy and sanctity as at first. In this sense, teachers and learners not only have the capacity to imitate God as Teacher and Moses as student, but to re-experience the superlative sanctity of the Sinaitic moment.

Such teaching and learning moments, when enacted as remembrances of Sinai, are said to be attended by the Presence of God.[4] As such, teaching and learning are more than a commemorative ritual recalling an event of the remote past. They are, instead, a temporal touchstone of renewal, reciprocally consecrated by the educative act of man, on the one hand, and God's involvement in that act, on the other. Through this Divine encounter, the efficacy, power and holiness of the revelation of Torah at Sinai is brought into the present, made as though it were happening afresh in that very moment. Much like the ritual recollection of Passover, in whose reenactment "a person must regard himself *as though he personally had gone out of Egypt,*"[5] in recalling the pedagogic encounter at Sinai, teachers and learners take Moses' place on Sinai. They become contemporary recipients of and participants in his face-to-face encounter with God as if it were happening to them presently in the first instance. This is achieved by repeating precisely what God did for Moses there, and what Moses subsequently did for the children of Israel thereafter, namely, by teaching Torah.

Again, all pedagogic encounters subsequent to the Sinaitic revelation can be attended by the Divine Presence. The verb "stood" from the verse 'The day that you stood before the Lord your God [at Sinai]'[6] can be interpreted in the "persistent future perfective" tense whereby "a single situation extends from the present into the future."[7] This reading suggests that God's continued presence attends all Judaic teaching moments properly oriented as renewals of the Sinaitic encounter. Those who teach and learn presently, then, do so with the same efficacy and amidst the same sanctity that Moses experienced on that occasion. It is perhaps for this reason, then, that the Talmud so emphatically states, "To those who study Torah, it is as beloved every day as the day when it was given from Mount Sinai,"[8] for the sanctity of seeing the face of God is said to attend the one at present just as it did the other in antiquity.

Just as it is incumbent upon mankind to actively remember the Teaching that God revealed at Sinai by teaching and learning Himself, so, too, is it a Divine imperative for God to reach out in a perpetual Sinaitic revelation to His people in each generation. One Talmudic Sage, Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, explained, "Each and every day a divine voice goes forth from Mount Sinai."[9] This dimension of teaching and learning's sanctity hearkens back to Childs'

---

[1] see Spackman and Yanchar, *Embodied Cognition, Representationalism, and Mechanism: A Review and Analysis*, 71.

[2] see *Talmud Bavli*, RH 27a.

[3] The term "observe" comes from the term "שמור," which in this instance is to be understood in the sense of living or fulfilling, as in "observe a commandment," rather than in the visual sense of the word synonymous with the term "to see," for example.

[4] *Pirkei Avot* 3:2

[5] see *Pesachim* 10:5 (emphasis added)

[6] see Deuteronomy 4:10.

[7] Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 489-490.

[8] *B. Sher* 63b.

[9] *Pirkei Avot* 6:2

conceptualization of Judaic remembrance as an encounter between man and God.[1] Seen in this way, teaching and learning's sanctity is derived both from their connection to an ancient, face-to-face encounter between God and a primordial prophet-pedagogue *and* God's present-day proximity to those who teach and learn today. In other words, inasmuch as teaching and learning represent a contemporary encounter between God and man, teaching and learning are both an Eliadean hierophany—a manifestation of the sacred—as well as a sacrament—a communion with the sacred.[2]

Jewish scripture often describes the teaching encounter at Sinai as having happened "in this midst of fire."[3] Just as Moses was enveloped in fire at Sinai, says the Talmud, "Anyone who wishes to engage in Torah study should view himself as if he were standing amidst fire."[4] "It is not just the Torah per se that is on fire," said Verman, "but also the activity of studying Torah, [itself both] intense and incendiary."[5] One passage tells of the scholar Ben Azzai who, as he sat expounding on scripture, was encompassed in fire. When the great Rav Akiva asked him why, he said that he had simply been studying words of Torah. "And were they not," he then asked, "at their first utterance uttered in fire?"[6] By comparing teaching and learning to fire,[7] whose perpetuation depends upon its being constantly tended, and asserting in the same breath that those who teach and learn are themselves consumed with that fire,[8] Jewish scripture infers that the original Sinaitic sanctity of teaching and learning depends upon the active involvement of living disciples. These must consistently receive, be engulfed in, then pass the flame on to another, just as much at Sinai as in every generation thereafter.

Teaching and learning's renewal of the revelation at Sinai is not limited to a single iteration, but is, instead, infinitely repeatable. In the story of Ben Azzai mentioned earlier, "the words," he said, "were as full of joy as when they were given at Sinai, as sweet as at the time of their first utterance."[9] Not only does the sanctity of teaching and learning not diminish in successive iterations, but it may actually increase with each repetition. "He who repeats his chapter one hundred times," says the Talmud, "does not compare to him who repeats it a hundred and one times."[10] Jewish scripture also tells of Rabbi Perida who, after teaching the same lesson to a student four hundred times, patiently led him through another four hundred lessons until he finally understood, at which point, in a moment remarkably like Moses' encounter at Sinai, a Divine voice extolled his efforts and offered him heavenly gifts.[11]

Though teaching and learning's connection to Sinai's sanctity is considered immanently powerful, it is also remarkably fragile and perishable. "Why are words of Torah likened to water, wine, and milk?" asks the Talmud. "Because," it answers, "just as these three liquids become unfit for consumption only through inattention, so words of Torah are forgotten only through inattention."[12] Despite its inherent power to connect its participants to God, Torah relies upon mankind's consistent, repeated action for its connection to the power of its Sinaitic origins to be renewed. Considering the responsibility this places in the hands of

---

[1] Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel.*
[2] see Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane.*
[3] see Deuteronomy 33:2, "*mimino eshdat l'mo* (ממינו אשדת למו),"
[4] *Midrash Tanhuma, Ve-Zot ha-Berakhah*, 31a.
[5] Mark Verman, "The Torah as Divine Fire," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2007): 95-96.
[6] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:10, §2.
[7] *Sif.* Deuteronomy, §343l Yalkut, *Berakhah,* §951
[8] ARN 28
[9] Song *Rabba* 1:10, §2.
[10] *B. Hag.* 9b.
[11] *B. Er.* 54b.
[12] *B. Ta.* 7a-b

those who teach and learn, the Talmud teaches, "He who studies Torah and does not go over what he has studied is like a man who sows but does not reap."[1] Not only is there "no other means whereby mankind can remember anything except through repetition," explained *Or Akiva's* Rav Eli, but such living remembrance is meant to change those who take part in it. Just as Moses' countenance had been changed by his encounter with God so that it radiated with light,[2] so do those who experience that archetypal encounter for themselves afresh change, as well. "As the light rain coming down upon tender blades of grass stirs them up so that they do not become wormy,"[3] so teaching and learning invites and instills growth and change in those who teach and learn while bathed in its light.

Rav Levi told me we were walking along the same path his rabbi had taught him many years before. From the time he had first followed those footsteps to the moment I followed in his, he had done one simple thing to remember it: he had walked it every day of his life. No map or written instruction, no matter how meticulously prepared, could match the vivid and tangible accuracy of his living remembrance of that route. So deeply had this commemorative act been embedded into his daily walk that, when the time came to pass it on to another, his living memory of that walk was just as vivid, perhaps even more so, than the day he had taken his first steps upon it. This was living remembrance, brought to light in the flux of daily experience so that, in its consistent and endless reenactment, its character might remain unchanged and its clarity undiminished in a form at once perennially renewed and inexorably linked to its primary instance. In learning, walking and teaching that path, teaching and learning had become a vehicle for that living remembrance, sanctified toward its perpetual renewal and eternal increase.

## *Consecratory Purpose and Eternity*

*"The sanctity of our methods doesn't come from who gave them to us, or how long we've had them, or anything else like that. They're sacred because God commanded us to teach and learn—not so much because of what the outcome would be, but more because of what the process would mean, and for who we would become in its fulfilment."*

The story is told of a man who owned an old, worn-out feedbag with a hole in it. One day, he hired two friends—one wise, one foolish—to do a job for him. "Pour water into the bag," he said, "and I will pay you for every jug you pour." Accepting his terms, the two friends set to work, but as the cool morning gave way to a hot afternoon, the foolish man turned to his friend and, in a tone that masked none of his rising frustration, asked, "What are we doing this for?" He lifted the old feedbag, still dripping, and shook it in his friend's face. "Look!" he shouted, shoving his arm through the gaping hole. "If I put water in at this end," he said, "it just flows out the other side! What's the point if we can't even fill the bag?" Slowly, the wise man reached out and took the bag from his friend. Then, filling a jug with water, he poured as water fell unhindered into the puddle at their feet. Standing ankle-deep in that water, the wise man wiped the sweat from his brow, filled yet another jug, and looked fixedly at his friend. "We don't get paid for filling the bag," he said, pouring a second time as a smile spread across his face. "We get paid for pouring the water."

After pouring a second time, the wise man passed the jug to his friend who, frustrated, perhaps, at the lingering feeling of futility in his heart, defiantly asked him of another task—more important, perhaps, but no less fruitless to him than water in a broken bag. "What about *my* work?" he asked. "When I study Torah, I forget what I learn—just like

[1] *B. San.h* 99a-b.
[2] see Exodus 34:29-35
[3] *Sif.* Deuteronomy, §307.

pouring water into this bag. It's pointless!" He threw the jug at the ground, but instead of smashing into a thousand pieces, it splashed harmlessly in the pool at their feet. To this, the wise man, placing a kindly hand on his friend's shoulder, picked up the old bag. "You're right," he said. "This job *is* like Torah study. We're not paid for filling the bag. It probably could never be filled. But if we're paid for pouring instead of filling, isn't that good for us? We could get paid all our lives for this job, so long as we kept doing our part." He paused, then added, "It's the same with Torah study. God rewards us for every effort we make, no matter what may happen thereafter. It's not about finishing Torah, just like it's not about filling the bag—their purpose is their process."

The previous theme highlighted how Judaic remembrance isn't the end result of a process, but a way of living—something that happens in the course of its fulfilment, rather than the culminating moment of its completion. By comparing teaching and learning to filling a bottomless bag with water, this story teaches a similar lesson. Just like the job from the story, God rewards those who teach and learn for their efforts, rather than for reaching some imagined end to them. In this sense, God's connection to (and the sanctity of) teaching and learning happens during their realization. The story also suggests that teaching and learning are endless and eternal, having no measurable end or outcome in which they culminate. Finally, by contrasting the way in which the wise and foolish men approached their task, it also intimates that participation alone, though key to both processes, is not enough to realize their purpose. "There are those," says the Talmud, "who gain eternity in a lifetime, and others who gain it in one brief hour."[1] The difference lay neither in their method (both scooped water with the same jug) nor their motivation (both wanted money). It lay, instead, in their awareness of the purpose for which the Owner of the bag had hired them, changing not the quantity of their labor, but its quality.

Importantly, from a Jewish perspective, neither man nor God alone can endow time with this quality of holiness. While mankind teaches and learns within the confines of mortal time[2] on the one hand, education's eternal nature and purpose lie uniquely within the eternal realm, and so are squarely under God's jurisdiction.[3] Any excursion into the eternal to sanctify the educative act, then, must not only be done in accordance with God's will, but in tandem with Him. What allows for this unity between God and man, bringing teaching and learning into contact with holiness and the eternal, lies in the story's lesson about consecratory intent. By becoming aware of He who decreed that mankind should teach and learn, together with a similar awareness of His purpose in doing so, those who teach and learn can, through the process and practice of education thus informed, consecrate their efforts, bringing them into the realm of eternity and so in contact with both God and His holiness.

God Himself, wrote the Psalmist, is eternal, "even from everlasting to everlasting."[4] As part of who God is,[5] then, eternity is also holy. In that sacred, eternal realm, the Eternal One is said to be both "the eternal Student"[6] as well as the eternal Teacher.[7] Beyond being eternal acts for God alone, teaching and learning are also described as eternal for mankind, lasting both throughout one's lifetime[8] and into the eternities.[1] Being both eternal itself and

---

[1] *Avodah Zarah* 10b, 17a, 18a.

[2] see, for example, Deuteronomy 11:19: "And ye shall teach them your children, speaking of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

[3] see Abraham's use of "Everlasting God" or "אל עולם" in Genesis 21:33; see also Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 99.

[4] see Psalms 90:2: "בטרם הרים ילדו ותחולל ארץ ותבל ומעולם על עולם אתה אל"

[5] see, for example, Leviticus 19:2, "קדשים תהיו כי קדוש אני יהוה אלהים"

[6] Simon Rawidowicz, *Israel: The Ever Dying People and Other Essays*, (Rutherford, Jew Jersey: Farliegh Dickinson University Press, 1986), 135-136.

[7] see *Pirkei Avot* 6:2, "Each and every day a divine voice goes forth from Mount Horeb [that is, Mount Sinai]"

[8] ibid., 5:23, "...ובה תחזי, וסיב ובלה בה..."

performed by the Eternal One, teaching and learning are doubly sacred, sharing one of God's key attributes (eternal-ness) and being one of His actions.

However strong the connection between education and holiness may be for God, its consecration among mankind still depends on the intent for which people teach and learn. In *Or Akiva's* tradition, this principle, whereby the intent behind one's teaching and learning can either consecrate or desecrate them, is called *torah lishmah* (תורה לשמה), or "Torah for its own sake." *Torah lishmah* (תורה לשמה) prescribes that Torah study be done not as a means to any ulterior end, but for no other reason than being presently and endlessly involved therein. Any other reason for doing so, says the Talmud, is not only unacceptable before God, thereby losing its consecratory potential, but even dangerous, both to the learning process itself (removing heavenly dimensions therefrom),[2] as well as to those who carry it out (changing study from "an elixir of life" into "a deadly poison.")[3]

"Perhaps you will say to yourself," says the Talmud, 'I will study Torah so that I may be called a wise man,' or, 'so that I may sit in the assembly of scholars,' or even 'so that I may have length of days in the world-to-come.'" No, reply the Sages. "Study regardless of reward," they say, "and in the end honor will come by itself. Do things for the sake of doing them. Study them for their own sake."[4] The heart of *Torah lishmah* (תורה לשמה), then, is one of participatory process rather than culminating outcome. To Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, "the goal of the act of intellection is not located in any external *telos*...but in the cognitive act itself...[and]...the transcendent meaningfulness of the act as such."[5] For any teaching or learning to be done *lishmah* (לשמה) and so realize its sacred potential, it must be done with no other motive than obeying God's commandment to teach, understanding, like Rav Levi's story of the bag, that its only purpose is one's present and perpetual involvement therein, and nothing more.

That teaching and learning are to be pursued presently and eternally, focusing on process and practice rather than their culminating end, flows out of a Judaic perspective of time, eternity and education's purpose within them. Unlike some perspectives[6] which paint time as antithetical to eternity,[7] Judaic time, says Heschel, is simply "eternity in disguise."[8] It is more like "an eternal burning bush"[9] in which mankind can experience "the taste of eternity" in the present moment[10] than a timeline on which fleeting present moments pass away. From this perspective, eternity is not the timeless condition that awaits mankind in a Judaic world-to-come. It is, instead, a characteristic of the present moment made conditional upon its consecration. "Though each instant must vanish to open the way to the next one," says Heschel, "time itself is not consumed."[11] Instead, it remains constant, its only movement apparent in the endless cyclicality by which it is eternally renewed each day, each year and each generation.

---

[1] see *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah,* p. 15, "The reward of the righteous in the world-to-come," says one Midrashic text, "will be further study of Torah."

[2] *B. Suk* 49b.

[3] *Deut. R.* 1:6

[4] *Sifre, Devarim,* ch. 48

[5] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 194.

[6] For a close look at the difficulty of reconciling the two, see Alvin J. Reines, "Time and Eternity" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, 115, (ed) Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 19 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007).

[7] see Hillel Schwartz, "Sacred Time" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 7987; see also OED's definition 'b' of *eternal*: "Not conditioned by time; not subject to time relations."

[8] see Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 16.

[9] ibid., 100.

[10] ibid., 74.

[11] ibid., 100.

Far from being spontaneously everlasting, however, time's eternal dimension is discernible only to those who, by realizing the dormant sanctity inherent in acts like teaching and learning, become aware of its awakening as they participate in it. Often compared to a melody,[1] Judaic time, in this sense, is inherently participatory, "not something at which to stare and from which we must humbly stay away,"[2] but something to be known experientially by firsthand participation[3] with God, who perpetually takes part[4] in the present moment.[5] This is the sanctification of time, made possible only by the united efforts of both man and God—a principle, says Rothschild, at the very heart of Judaism itself.[6] One way in which God and man can together realize such temporal sanctification is through teaching and learning.

This temporal sanctity of teaching and learning, though propositionally elusive, can be experientially discerned through the light shining[7] in the countenances of those who presently live in this eternal realm. "We have seen with our own eyes," said Rabbi Hayim, "the tremendous change. The light of holiness blazes in his heart...So resplendent is his countenance that one almost hesitates to come close to him."[8] Exhibiting an almost mystical elusiveness, however, teaching and learning's temporal sanctity comes only to those who do not expressly seek it out as a recompense for their efforts. These gifts, instead, come only to those who teach and learn for its own sake. The self-abnegation required to commit to a lifetime of such endless activity "produces an ineffable change"[9] in such people, awakening the seed of sanctity within them. Those who do so, it is said, become one with, participate and partake in the sanctity of eternity, which, said Heschel, is a manifestation of God Himself.[10]

The blessings accorded those who teach and learn *Torah lishmah* (תורה לשמה) go beyond this inner light. "He who occupies himself with Torah for its own sake," said Rav Meir, "acquires many boons,"[11] which includes awakening the divine nature of man—something, said Rosenak, "beyond the joys of intellectual understanding."[12] One who teaches and learns in this way, says the Talmud, is like one who plunges into the waters of Torah and, once there, remains, becoming "a fountain that never ceases and a stream that gathers strength."[13] Far from happening in an instant, or even a lifetime, such sanctification is an endless process. "In a different place," said Rav Berkowitz, "you can get great knowledge,"

---

[1] Ole J. Thienhaus, "Jewish Time: Ancient Practice, Hellenistic and Modern Habits, Freud's Reclaiming," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 48, no.4 (1999): 444.
[2] see Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 87.
[3] ibid., 443.
[4] see *Siddur Ashkenaz*, Weekday *Shacharit*, Blessings of the *Shema*, First Blessing Before *Shema*: "In Your goodness, day after day, You renew Creation," or, "ובטובו מחדש בכל יום תמוד מעשה בראשית".
[5] see Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 100.
[6] Fritz Rothschild, *Between God and Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1959), 214-218.
[7] Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 87.
[8] Hayyim Tuer of Cernowitz, *Sidduro shel Shabbat* (Jerusalem, 1872), 8c.
[9] Rosenak, *Roads to the Palace: Jewish Texts and Teaching,* 232-233.
[10] see Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 100.
[11] see *Pirkei Avot* 6:1, "The entire world is under obligation to him. He is called [God's] companion, [God's] beloved, one who loves Him who is everywhere, one who loves his fellow men, one who gladdens Him who is everywhere, one who gladdens his fellow men. The Torah clothes him with humility and fear of God, and fits him to be virtuous and devout, upright and faithful. It keeps him far from sin and draws him near to the doing of good deeds. Men are aided by his counsel, sagacity, understanding, and strength. It gives him a regal appearance, a manner that commands respect, and the capacity to be searching in judgment. Secret meanings of the Torah are received to him, and he becomes a fountain that never ceases and a stream that gathers strength. With it, he is modest, long suffering, and forgiving of personal slight. The Torah makes him great and exalts him above all of God's works."
[12] Rosenak, *Roads to the Palace: Jewish Texts and Teaching,* 232-233.
[13] *Pirkei Avot* 6:1

he said, "but because we believe in God, we believe that we are dealing with something eternal. It's all about eternity." Only when one sees it in its eternal dimension does the educative process come within reach of the Divine, and thereby realize its sacred potential.

Like a fig tree, says the Talmud, teaching and learning is not only eternal in duration, but endless in scope, as well. "The more one tends it," say the Sages, "the more figs one finds on it—so it is with words of Torah." The very act of study opens one's eyes, as it were, to see how much more there is to understand and become through that study.[1] "The more one learns," said Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, "the more he wants to learn, for by means of the light which we have already attained we can see that there is yet more light, and we hope to attain that too." Rav Hayyim further compares the eternal nature of learning to "one who enters a room in the treasure house of the king." At the back of this room, itself filled with all manner of treasure, he finds "a door leading to an inner chamber," and another, and another, until he begins to revel in the revelatory process itself, regardless of ever finding an end to those inner chambers.[2]

"In the way of the world," explains the Talmud, "if two merchants stand side by side, one with yarn and the other with cloth," and they trade, "what the one now has the other has no longer. Not so with Torah," it continues. "If one studies one chapter, and the other another, both will gain all and lose nothing if they only teach one another what they've learned." Like lighting a candle from another candle,[3] teaching is co-eternal with learning. Though the first flame gives life to the second, its own fire remains undiminished. Just like learning, then, teaching is infinite in scope, and can be given to others without ever coming to an end. Yet, this infinity and perpetuity is only possible in and through living teachers acting in accordance with God's commandment to teach and with nothing but the process as the purpose behind their actions. In this sense, it is not the concept of teaching and learning that is holy, but the process of its realization, brought to life by living teachers and learners.

When I finally had the chance to interview Rav Levi, he invited me to walk with him. But our destination—a tailor's shop where he would buy a new suit—had little to do with why we had walked there. And while the circumstances of our meeting had been more than a little haphazard, it became clearer with every step that the decision to walk somewhere, rather than sit inside for a formal interview, had been a deliberate one. In taking me on that walk, Rav Levi hadn't just shown me where to buy a suit. No, the interview's purpose lay in the journey itself as he talked with me, answered questions and showed me holiness all along the way. In short, the purpose of our interview was not about a destination, but a journey—its potential fulfilled, like holiness itself, in the process of its realization, rather than its outcome.

---

[1] see *B. E.r* 54a-b: "Why are words of Torah likened to the fig tree? As with the fig tree, the more one tends it, the more figs one finds on it, so with words of Torah: the more one studies them, the more relish one finds in them."

[2] Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 244.

[3] ibid.

# *Sanctification by Functionality*

*"The question isn't whether our methods are utilitarian or sacred. It's both, don't you see? Our methods haven't been sanctified despite the fact that they work. They're sanctified because they work. Our methods are sanctifying as we are sanctified by them—both in who we become as a result, and in who we are in the process."*

"Pause and consider," says the Talmud, "that the way of the Holy One is not at all like the way of the world. In the way of the world, an empty vessel may be filled, while a full one cannot. But," it continues, "with the Holy One, it is not so. With Him, a full vessel can be filled even more, but an empty one cannot be filled at all." So it is with learning, the Talmud maintains, for "if you hearken to what you have already learned, you will be able to hearken to what is new. But if your heart turns away, you will not be able to hearken at all."[1] Jewish scripture is filled with passages just like this one that explicitly address the nature of teaching and learning. Other such passages compare teaching to fatherhood,[2] learning to grinding wheat[3] and God's teaching to fire,[4] water[5] or even the fruit of a fig tree.[6] Many of Judaism's sacred texts make specific recommendations about educational structures and logistics, the attributes of good teachers and learners, philosophy of education, educative methods and even promised blessings to those who realize them. When taken together, these passages paint a picture of a dynamic educational tradition richly informed by a scriptural tradition whose educative prescriptions directly inform teaching and learning practice today.

Such practical prescriptions can be as simple as where a teacher should stand while teaching,[7] where one should sit while learning,[8] or even the most effective time of day for study.[9] Others speak of where one should study, some saying it must be a location specifically dedicated for the purpose,[10] others that it should simply be near a teacher.[11] Scripture also specifies the proper age for study, beginning with the alphabet at three,[12] Scripture at five, Mishnah at ten and Talmud at fifteen.[13] though these vary between traditions.[14] Once able to study all of these, a student is advised to divide his daily study

---

[1] *B. Ber* 40a.
[2] ARN 8., "How may the matter be illustrated? By the parable of a young son who, being left behind when his father went to the marketplace, up and took a Torah scroll, sat down, placed it between his knees, and began to make out its words. When his father came back from the marketplace, he said: Look what he did! My little boy..."
[3] see B. AZ 19a., "...when the Holy One gave Torah to Israel, He gave it to them as wheat out of which the fine flour of Mishnah was to be produced..."
[4] *Tanhuma, Yitro*, §12., "The Torah is all fire. It was given out of fire and it is like fire."
[5] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:2, §3; MTeh 1:18; Sif Deut., §48, "Words of Torah are likened to waters."
[6] *Yalkut*, Josh., §2, citing *Yelammedenu*, "...Torah is likened to a fig tree..."
[7] *B. Er.* 54b., "If three men walk together on a road, the teacher should be in the middle, the elder of the other two on his right, and the younger on his left."
[8] *B. Meg.* 21a., "...a master should not sit on a couch teaching a disciple who sits crouched on the ground..."
[9] *B. Er.* 65a., "'Moonlight was created only for study.' When R. Zera was told, 'The traditions you report are stated immaculately,' he would reply, 'They are the result of daytime study.'"[9]
[10] Tanhuma, *Be-hukkotai*, §3; *Tanhuma* B, *Be-hukkotai*, §3., "Go to the house of study and I will teach you there."
[11] *B. Mak.* 10a., "If a teacher is banished, his entire house of study should be banished with him."
[12] Midrash cited by *Darkhe Moshe* on Tur Yoreh Deah, §245. See also *Tanhuma, Kedoshim*, §14., "At the age of three, a child is ready for the letters of the alphabet."
[13] *Pirkei Avot* 5:21, "At the age of five, [a child is ready] for Scripture. At ten, for Mishnah...At fifteen, for Talmud."
[14] B. BB 21a. and En Yaakov, ad loc., "It was ordained that...youths enter school at the age of sixteen or seventeen...but [later] that children enter school at the age of six or seven."

equally between them.[1] If, after a certain period, a student shows no signs of progress, it is said that he never will,[2] though such a student is not excused from the obligation to continue studying. Other passages speak of the teacher-disciple relationship, advising when to learn from one teacher or many,[3] how one learns more by living with a teacher than simply attending class,[4] or, if limited to a classroom environment, what the ideal student-teacher ratio should be therein.[5]

Sacred Jewish texts also speak of the attributes necessary for proper teaching and learning. Some seem obvious and in no way unique to the Judaic tradition: learning is difficult when drowsy,[6] study requires focus,[7] teaching demands patience,[8] and neither arrogance[9] nor ostentation[10] help any of them. Others seem more unique to a Jewish context: that a bashful person cannot learn,[11] for example, or that students must reverence their teachers.[12] On a more personal level, one must not be overly preoccupied by things of this world,[13] the mysteries of the heavens,[14] or even wealth and status.[15] To learn, says the Talmud, one must be "willing to be degraded," called "an idiot,"[16] even to "make oneself as nothing,"[17] for "just as water flows from a higher level to a lower one, so words of Torah abide only with one who is meek in spirit and humble."[18] "Humility," the Talmud simply states, "is the sandal of Torah."[19]

These scriptural injunctions are supplemented by a robust and dynamic philosophy of education. The idea that teaching and learning are inherently difficult,[20] for instance, leads

---

[1] *B. Kid.* 30a., "A man should divide his daily study into three parts—a third for Scripture, a third for Mishnah, and a third for Talmud."
[2] *B. Hul.* 24a., "A pupil who shows no discernible advance in his studies after five years is not likely ever to show it. R. Yose asserted: After three years, for it is said, "To be taught the learning and the language of the Chaldeans...they are to be trained three years" (Daniel 1:4-5)."
[3] B. AZ 19a-b., "He who studies under only one teacher will never see a sign of blessing. But as to matters that are to be committed to memory, it is better to learn them from only one teacher, lest the student be confused by differing versions taught by his several teachers."
[4] *B. Ber.* 7b., "A disciple's attending upon a sage is more valuable than the sage's direct teaching."
[5] B. BB 21a-b, "Rava said: The maximum number of pupils to be assigned to each teacher of little children is twenty-five. If there are fifty children, two teachers are to be appointed. If there are forty, the teacher should be given an assistant to be paid by the city."
[6] *B. Sanh.* 21a., "If a man dozes off in the house of study, his knowledge will become raggedy."
[7] *B. Er.* 65a., "Study...requires clarity of mind as [perfect as the clarity of light on] a day when the north wind blows."
[8] *Pirkei Avot* 2:5, "Hillel said: An impatient man is not fit to be a teacher."
[9] *B. Er.* 55a., "Torah will not be found among those who are arrogant."
[10] *P. Ber.* 5:1, 9a., "He who labors at his studies without ostentation will not soon forget them."
[11] *Pirkei Avot* 2:5., "A bashful person is not apt to learn."
[12] *B. Shab.* 30b; B. Pes 117a., "When a disciple of the wise sits before his master, and his lips do not tremble in anxiety and awe, those lips deserve to be scorched."
[13] Exodus *Rabba* 6:2, "Surely business turneth a wise man into a fool" (Ecclesiastes 7:7). When a sage busies himself with many [worldly matters], his wisdom gets addled."
[14] Deuteronomy *Rabba* 8:6, "Torah is not to be found among astrologers, who spend their time gazing at the heavens."
[15] *Yalkut,* Ruth, §597., "The Torah said to the Holy One: Let my portion be in the tribe [of Levi],[15] which is marked by [its] property. For when rich people are at all occupied with me, they swell up with pride. But people who are poor, even when occupied entirely with me, continue to be mindful that they are hungry and lowly." See also *Mek, Be-shallah*, *Va-yassa*, 3., "Torah was given to be expounded only by those who [are so poor that they] have [nothing but] manna to eat and only secondarily by those who eat [fat] *terumah* [heave offering]."
[16] see *B. Ta* 7a. and En Yaakov, ad loc.; ARN 11; Yalkut, Prov., §904.
[17] see *B. Sot* 21b.
[18] *B. Ta* 7a. and *En Yaakov,* ad loc.
[19] *Tanhuma, Bereshit*, §1.
[20] *B. Meg* 6a., "R. Isaac said: If a man claims, 'I labored but did not find,' do not believe him; 'I did not labor but found nevertheless,' do not believe him; 'I labored and found,' believe him."

teachers away from the goal of making learning easier and toward helping students through a process whose difficulty is not only an inescapable part of its nature, but also source of its sanctifying power.[1] Furthermore, these sacred texts are clear that, though everyone may approach teaching and learning differently from their peers,[2] one must live by what one learns.[3] This kind of daily, lived practice,[4] however, is described as both difficult to come by and frustratingly easy to lose if neglected.[5] In short, Judaism's holy texts focus primarily on practical dimensions of teaching and learning such as these.

Jewish scripture also directly addresses how to teach. It begins with fairly basic suggestions: know what you are teaching before you teach it,[6] be prepared to answer questions,[7] use correct teaching materials[8] and be free with your time in helping students.[9] This ancient scripture even makes suggestions about how to teach students of differing abilities in the same class,[10] or whether it is better to teach a little material in-depth, or more material only superficially.[11] Other prescriptions are more unique to a Jewish context, such as only teaching those who are worthy[12] and doing so entirely for free.[13] Balance also plays a key role in Judaism's scripturally-informed pedagogy.[14] Although one must teach using as few words as possible,[15] for instance, teachers must be willing to repeat any lesson *ad infinitum* should a student require it.[16] And while one must teach as thoroughly and vigorously as if he were feeding an ox,[17] there is still room for humor,[18] especially to wake

---

[1] *B. Ta* 7b-8a., "Rava said: If you see a student whose studies come as hard to him as iron, it is because his teacher does not encourage him."

[2] *Sif.* Deuteronomy, §307; Yalkut, *Haazinu*, §942., "Even as droplets of rain come down upon tender blades of grass and cause them to rise up—some green, some red, some black, and some white—so do words of Torah affect human beings. Some become savants, some men of worth, some Sages, some righteous and some saintly."

[3] *B. Git* 43a., "A man does not fully understand words of Torah until he has stumbled over them."

[4] *P. Ber* 9:8, 14d., "If you leave me [Torah] for one day, I will leave you for two."

[5] *B. Hag* 15a., "Words of Torah are as expensive to acquire as vessels of gold or vessels of fine gold and are as fragile as vessels of glass."

[6] *Tanhuma, Yitrao*, §15., "If you are a man of learning, do not be so arrogant as to say something in front of an assembly before you have made the matter clear to yourself."

[7] *B. Kid.* 30a-b., "See to it that words of Torah are sharply and readily articulated in your mouth, so that if a man inquires of you about a certain matter, you will not have to hem and haw before answering him, but you will be able to answer him at once."

[8] *B. Pes* 112a., "When you teach your son, teach him from a corrected scroll."

[9] *B. Er* 54a., "If a man allows himself to be treated as a furrow, upon which everybody treads, and as spices, with which everybody perfumes himself, his learning will endure."

[10] B. BB 21a and En Yaakov, ad loc., "The bright child who is quick to learn will learn to read quickly [by himself]; and the one who is not quick, seat him next to one who is."

[11] B. BB 21a-b., "If there are two teachers, one of whom covers much ground but is not exact, and the other is exact but does not cover much ground, the one who covers ground but is not exact is to be appointed. And the reason? In time, mistakes correct themselves. However, R. Dimi of Nehardea maintained that the one who is exact and does not cover much ground is to be appointed. The reason? A mistake once implanted stays."

[12] *B. Hul* 133a and En Yaakov, ad loc., "When a man teaches a disciple who is unworthy, he is as much of an idolater as one who tosses a pebble on a statue of Mercury."

[13] *P. Ned* 4:3, 38a., "Even as I have taught for free, so you are to teach for free."

[14] *B. Sot* 47a and En Yaakov, ad loc., "Our masters taught: Always, while your left hand repulses, make your right hand draw near."

[15] see Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14; *B. Hul* 63b., "A teacher should always teach in as few words as possible."

[16] *B. Er* 54b., "R. Perida had a pupil to whom he had to repeat his lesson four hundred times before he was able to learn it. R. Perida: 'Pay attention now, and I will teach you [once more].'"

[17] B. BB 21a and En Yaakov, ad loc., "Stuff Torah into him as though he were an ox [to be fattened]."

[18] *B. Pes* 117a., "Before beginning his discourse to the Sages, Rabbah used to say something humorous in order to amuse them. After that, he sat down and with awe began to discourse on *halakhah*."

sleeping students during class.[1] Most of all, however, is a single injunction that links all these pedagogies to sanctity itself, namely, that just as God the Teacher taught Moses at Sinai, so every Jewish teacher thereafter is, in an endless pedagogic *imitatio dei,* to teach as God teaches.[2]

Jewish scripture also makes recommendations for how to learn. Begin learning when you are young,[3] it says, and it will become part of who you are.[4] Do it regularly,[5] systematically,[6] in a frenzy,[7] and even if you forget what you learn, keep studying anyway.[8] Study first, it emphasizes, and meditate later.[9] Learn general principles[10] little by little[11] using mnemonic signs to remember them[12] so that you may think through them thoroughly thereafter.[13] Read from physical books, the tradition maintains,[14] that you may remember all the more clearly for having seen what you learn.[15] For though not one word of what you study is without profound meaning,[16] it is better to know one thing well than many things only halfway.[17] Such sacred texts further insist that one should not study alone. Rather than rely on your own understanding,[18] it says, provide yourself with a teacher[19] and a learning companion,[20] for he who studies on his own[1] is no match for one so aided.[2] All this study,

---

[1] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:15, §3., "As Rabbi [Judah I, the Patriarch] was in the teacher's chair expounding Scripture, the assembly became drowsy. Wishing to stir them awake, he said, 'A woman brought forth six hundred thousand in a single birth.' There was a certain disciple there, named R. Ishmael son of R. Yose, who asked, 'Who can that have been?' Rabbi [Judah] replied, 'That was Jochebed, who bore Moses, deemed equal to six hundred thousand of Israel.'" (For a similar account, see also Gen. R. 58:3).

[2] *B. Ber* 63b., "The Holy One said to Moses: Moses, even as I showed you a cheerful face [to encourage you to study Torah], so you are to show a cheerful face to Israel [to encourage them to study Torah]."

[3] ARN 23., "When a man learns Torah in his youth, he may be compared to dough that has been kneaded with warm water. When a mans learns Torah during is advanced years, he may be compared to dough that has been kneaded with cold water."

[4] ARN 24; Avot 4:20., "When a man learns Torah while young, the words of Torah are absorbed into his very blood and issue from his mouth in explicit form. When a man learns Torah in his youth, what may he be compared to? To ink written on a clean sheet. When a man learns in his old age? To ink written on a sheet from which the original writing has been erased."

[5] *Pirkei Avot* 1:15, "Shammai said: Make your study of Torah a regular practice."

[6] B. Ta 7b-8a., "If you see a disciple whose studies are as hard as iron for him, it is because he has not arranged his study in systematic fashion. What is his remedy? To attend the sessions of the Sages more regularly."

[7] *Yalkut, Eccles.,* §968., "R. Hanina bar Papa said: Torah, which I studied in a frenzy, stayed with me."

[8] B. AZ 19a., "A man should keep studying, even though he forgets, even though he does not quite understand what he is studying."

[9] B. AZ 19a., "One should always study Torah first, then meditate upon it."

[10] *Sif* Deuteronomy, §306 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 336)., "R. Judah said: A man should always gather words of Torah in the form of general principles and bring them forth as specific details."

[11] *B. Er* 54b and *En Yaakov,* ad loc., "When a man acquires his Torah bundle by bundle [much at a time], his learning diminishes; but if little by little, it increases." (See also Sif Deut., §48., Num. R. 21:15 and Lev. R. 19:2; Deuteronomy *Rabba* 8:3; Song R. 5:11, §2. )

[12] *B. Er* 54b and *En Yaakov*, ad loc., "R. Hisda said: The Torah can be acquired only by mnemonic signs."

[13] *P. Ber* 5:1. 9a., "He who thinks through what he studies will not quickly forget it."

[14] *P. Ber* 5:1, 9a., "As certain as a formal covenant is the assurance that he who studies *Agadah* from a book will not soon forget it."

[15] *B. Men* 43b., "Seeing assures remembering."

[16] *Tanhuma B, Hukkat*, §52., "All words of Torah need one another, for what one word closes, another opens." (See also P. RH 3:5, 58d.)

[17] Leviticus *Rabba* 3:1; *Yalkut,* Eccles., §971., "Better is he who studies two divisions of Mishnah and is familiar with them than he who studies *Halakhot* and is not familiar with them.[17] Better is he who leases one field, manures it, and hoes it than he who leases many fields and leaves them untilled."

[18] *Pirkei Avot* 4:15., "As for your own understanding, don't depend on it."

[19] ibid. 1:16., Provide yourself with a teacher, and thus remove yourself from doubt."

[20] ibid. 1:6; ARN 8., "Provide yourself with a teacher and get yourself a companion [to study with]." (See also Genesis *Rabba* 69:2)

though, must lead to practice,[3] for learning itself, says the Talmud, is not a matter of cerebral acquisition, but one of inviting the precepts of Torah to live within you,[4] that its sanctity might manifest itself through both learning and practice, whose separation is an abomination before God.[5] After all, learning, Jewish scripture stipulates, is why mankind was created in the first place.[6]

For the fulfilment of all these scriptural injunctions, Jewish tradition promises specific blessings. Some of these pertain specifically to educational practice: God attends all pedagogic encounters,[7] further light and knowledge are given to those who teach and learn,[8] and one's love of study increases in proportion to the devotion given to it.[9] Furthermore, to those engaged in Torah study, Jewish scripture promises personal improvement,[10] freedom,[11] Heavenly mercy[12] and answers to prayer.[13] It also promises more far-reaching blessings, such as protection in time of war[14] and the that the world itself might endure.[15] Further, not only can teaching and learning bring one eternal life,[16] but after a lifetime of such dedicated study, one can be taken to Heaven to study with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob themselves in order to become as great as they.[17]

At the heart of all these methodological prescriptions lies a single verse that describes forty-eight ways by which one may teach and learn Torah.[18] These prescriptions fall into two

---

[1] *B. Ta* 7a., "Just as fire does not ignite of itself, so words of Torah do not abide in him who studies by himself." (*See also B. BB 21a.)*

[2] *B. Ket* 111a., "A man who studies on his own is no match for one who studies with a teacher."

[3] *Pirkei Avot* 6:4, "Your study should lead to practice."

[4] *B. Sanh* 99b., "Rava said: All bodies are sheaths. Blessed is he who is privileged to be a sheath for Torah."

[5] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 205-206.

[6] *Pirkei Avot* 2:8, "Do not give yourself airs if you have learned much Torah, because for this purpose you were created."

[7] ibid. 3:2, "When the two sit together and words of Torah are spoken between them, the Presence abides with them." (See also Avot 3:3 and Avot 3:6.)

[8] ibid. 6:1, "[For] him who occupies himself with Torah for its own sake...Secret meanings of the Torah are received to him...The Torah makes him great and exalts him above all of God's works."

[9] *B. Er* 54a-b., "As with the fig tree, the more one tends it, the more figs one finds on it, so with words of Torah: the more one studies them, the more relish one finds in them."

[10] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:3, §2., "Just as when you hold a cup full of oil and a drop of water falls into it, a drop of oil of equal volume will be forced out, so, too, when a word of Torah enters the heart, a scoffing word equal in volume will be forced out. And contrariwise, when a scoffing word enters the heart, a word of Torah equal in volume will be forced out."

[11] *Pirkei Avot* 6:2., "No man is truly free unless he occupies himself with study of Torah."

[12] *Ka R.* 2., "Once the Holy One observes young children in their schools and disciples of the wise in their houses of study, His anger immediately turns into mercy."

[13] *B. Ta* 24a and En Yaakov, ad loc., "Once Rav came to a certain place where, though he had decreed a fast, no rain fell. Presently a reader stepped down in front of Rav before the Ark and recited, "He causeth the wind to blow," and the wind blew; then, "He causeth the rain to fall," and raind fell. Rav asked him: What is your occupation? He replied: I am a teacher of young children."

[14] Genesis *Rabba* 65:20; Lam. R., proem 2., "When all the nations came to them and asked, "Can we take on this nation of Israel in battle?" they replied, "Go out and make the rounds of their synagogues and houses of study. If you come upon children within them, chirping away in their childish voices, you will be unable to take on this nation in battle."

[15] *B. Shab* 119b., "The world endures only because of the breath of schoolchildren."

[16] *B. Ber* 48b., "The reading of the Torah, which brings life eternal." (See also ARN 28.)

[17] Eccles. *Rabba* 5:11, §5., "Whoever has wearied himself with Torah in this world is not allowed to sleep in the world to come. He is taken to the house of study of Shem and Eber, of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and of Moses and Aaron. For how long? 'Until I make thee a great name, like unto the name of the great ones that were in the earth' (2 Samuel 7:9; 1 Chronicles 17:8)."

[18] *Pirkei Avot* 6:6: "Study [aloud]; attentive listening; distinct pronunciation; alertness of mind; intuitive insight; awe [of one's master]; reverence [for God]; humility; cheerfulness; cleanness; attendance on Sages; intense examination of a matter in the company of colleagues; subtle discussion with disciples; unhurried reflection;

categories: methods and attributes—in other words, things one is to *do,* and others one ought to *be*. Seen in this light, for proper, scripturally-informed teaching and learning to take place, correct practice must be supplemented by appropriate dispositions, motivations and attributes. Without these two elements working in tandem, the divine potential of the Judaic educative act may not be realized in its fullness. Furthermore, those at *Or Akiva* maintain that all these pedagogic prescriptions come from texts that were given directly to Moses by God.[1] As such, these methodological prescriptions are not only religiously-informed, but inherently sacred by virtue of their divine authorship.

However, there is another element to how the Jewish tradition approaches teaching and learning, one which stands almost entirely apart from the strict obedience to a Divinely-sanctioned set of scriptural methods just outlined. This alternative approach is a utilitarian one, whose core was best described by Rabbi Berkowitz: "Look," he said, "it's simple: we work with what works." Behind his pithy phrase lay a framework that went back millennia. The giving of Torah at Sinai has no specific date in history, the Talmudic commentator *Rashi* explains, because "the words of Torah should be considered new...as though they were given today."[2] As such, Judaism's sacred Teaching is both grounded in tradition (by virtue of its connection to Sinai's theophany) and open to adaptation (by virtue of *Rashi's* "newness") in the present.

This applies specifically in the case of teaching and learning, some of whose most fundamental contemporary methods, such as *khavrusa* (חברותא) and even the *yeshiva* (ישבה) system itself, became part of the tradition long after Moses' revelation at Sinai. Beyond innovation within the tradition, Jewish education is also open to non-Jewish sources for new methods and techniques. "If someone tells you there is wisdom among the Gentiles," the Talmud famously stipulates, "believe it."[3] Various rabbis at *Or Akiva,* for instance, used online databases to search the Talmud, administered written exams and openly discussed Greek philosophy. Rather than uniquely adhere to scriptural prescription, then, Jewish pedagogic tradition seems willing to embrace a more utilitarian approach, capable of adopting unprecedented practices and principles, even non-Jewish ones, so long as they aid in the fulfilment of education's purpose from a Judaic perspective.

On the surface, this appears to present a significant dilemma. It was this very tension between strict orthodoxy, on the one hand, and unfettered openness, on the other, that moved me to ask Rav Levi on our walk, "Are all these methods sacred, or are they just utilitarian?" According to the Rav, however, my question was all wrong. "These methods aren't *either* sacred *or* utilitarian," he had said. "They're both," though not in the way I had thought. Yes, these methods were sacred by virtue of their Divine authorship; and yes, sacred scripture did allow for a more utilitarian approach to teaching and learning in general. But regardless of their origins, these methods were connected to a source of sanctity more present and robust than even their Divine authorship: sanctity by functionality. "They were sacred," he said,

---

persistence in study of Scripture and Mishnah; strict moderation in business, in sleep, in chitchat, in pleasure, in hilarity, and in worldly interests; patience; a good heart; faith in the Sages; resignation to afflictions; knowing one's place; contentment with one's lot; restraint in one's words; refraining from claiming merits for oneself; being loved; loving Him who is present everywhere; loving fellow creatures; loving reproof and rectitude; shunning honor; avoiding pride in one's learning; taking no delight in laying down the law; bearing the yoke with one's fellow; judging him charitably; guiding him to the true [*halakhah*]; urging him to reconciliation [in a dispute]; being systematic in study; asking and answering; listening and being ready to answer [when asked]; learning in order to teach; studying in order to practice [precepts]; making his teacher wiser [by pointed questions]; noting with precision what he is hearing; and giving credit for a comment to the one who made it."

[1] see *Mishnah Sanhedrin* 10:1, "One who says the Torah is not from heaven [is] among those who have no portion in the World-to-Come."

[2] see *Rashi, Midrash*, Exodus 19:1.

[3] see *Eichah Rabbah* 2:13.

"*because they worked,"* because the process of their lived fulfilment had the capacity to realize the underlying purpose of Torah study itself.

Rather than be linked to God, and so made sacred by virtue of their Divine origins alone, Jewish teaching and learning methods now had a second sanctifying point of Divine connection that happened as they fulfilled their sacred purpose. This new Divine connection was not in a purpose imagined, but a purpose fulfilled, and so perhaps of an even greater sanctity than that derived from Divine authorship alone. Like a seed, sanctification by Divine authorship, though valid, is only a dormant potentiality. Sanctification by functionality, on the other hand, like the tree that grows from that seed, is connected to God not by its potential alone, but by virtue of its living realization of the Divine intent for which it had been given. This second type of sanctification embraces both the sacred and utilitarian elements of teaching and learning outlined earlier. The locus of its sanctity is its utility in fulfilling a Divine purpose. That Divine purpose—the reason for which God invites His people to endlessly engage in His Teaching[1]—is to draw closer to, commune with and become like Him.

"A person grows as a human being," said *Or Akiva's* Rav Rosen, "by engaging in this type of study. "That's the ultimate purpose here—not just to get knowledge, but to get closer to God. When you are studying the word of God," he continued, "you are by definition getting closer to Him." Teaching and learning have been seen in this "sanctifying" light by generations, each finding "holiness in their effort"[2] to teach and learn. This holiness, said Lamm, "is not a magical phenomenon, divorced from the human-divine relationship, but rather an intensification of that relationship."[3] And in such intensified closeness,[4] one may then begin to commune with Him.

"When a man purchases an object," asks the *Nefesh HaChaim,* "can he be said to acquire its owner as well? Yet the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, saying to them, as it were, 'You are acquiring me.'" God's teaching, in this sense, is not portrayed as a commodity outside Himself, but instead as God giving Himself to His children, teaching them who He is, rather than something He has. In this sense, when one studies Torah, one is communing with God, for "the Holy One, blessed be He, and the Torah are one."[5] "Through the study of the holy Torah," continues the *Nefesh HaChaim,* "one fulfills the Divine intention in creating the world,"[6] that is, to engage and commune with Him.[7] By teaching and learning, then, one can attain an "unmediated communion with God,"[8] in reverential imitation of the primordial pedagogic encounter at Sinai.

Approaching and communing with God in this way has the power to transform the "human personality,"[9] elevating man to be more like God. "It appears," said *Bach,* "that God's intent was always that we should occupy ourselves with the Torah so that our soul should *realize itself.*"[10] There is no other way to achieve this, says the *Nefesh Hayyim,* "no way to attain the sparks of the light of the [soul] other than by sacred toil [in] contemplation

---

[1] see *Nefesh HaChaim* 4:13

[2] Back to the sources quote "The Talmud is a book put together by people who saw intellectual activity as sanctifying. They found holiness in their effort."

[3] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 193.

[4] see *Nefesh HaChaim* 4:6

[5] ibid., 4:10.

[6] ibid., 4:13.

[7] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 114.

[8] ibid., 112.

[9] ibid., 114.

[10] *Orach Chaim,* p. 47. (emphasis added)

of the Holy Torah."[1] "Even knowledge," said *Or Akiva's* Rav Feldman, "is an experiential expression of what the religion is. Any given human learning, especially Jewish learning, is supposed to improve someone. And here's the tricky thing: there doesn't need to be a direct connection between what you're learning and how it improves you." Far from being a set of explicit instructions on *how* to change, the simple act of Torah study affects a change from within, regardless of the topic being discussed.[2] By virtue of the process itself, the seed of the soul's potentiality grows into what Lamm calls "the realization of the *neshamah* (נשמה)," or Godly soul.[3] "Torah study," said Levi, not only "leads to recognition" of God, but "emulation of God," as well.[4] In sum, the purpose of teaching and learning at *Or Akiva,* said Rav Rosen, was "to get closer to God," and "be more like God" in the process.

Becoming like God through teaching and learning is "the chief value in this existence..., the *telos* of all existence,"[5] not to be pursued as a means to an end, but as an eternal way of being in the world. For, said the *Ruach Chaim,* "The main thing is the act of learning; knowledge is secondary to it."[6] "Man truly lives," said the *Nesfesh HaChaim,* "*during the time* that he is attached to the Holy Torah."[7] In this way, education's sanctity is not so much something one can do, but something one can be and become. The teaching and learning methods of Judaism are sacred because they work, Rav Levi explained, "as we are sanctified by them...in the process." Education's purpose, then, is not just to be close or connected to sanctity. It is to be holy even as God is holy.[8]

## *Sanctity through Orality*

*A thread, invisible to the eyes, but tangible in some other way, connected the yeshiva's sanctity with our walking and our talking—not so much in what we were talking about, but in the very act of talking itself.*

Of all the methods available to Him, God chose to communicate Torah to His children by speaking to a single man, alone on a mountain, face-to-face and one-on-one.[9] Seeing a profound significance in this, Judaism has often looked upon that encounter as an archetype for all pedagogic encounters, for just as God taught Moses, so was Moses commanded to teach the children of Israel in the same way.[10] And so he did, says the Talmud, teaching first Aaron, then Aaron's sons and, finally, the elders of Israel, repeating aloud each time the lessons he had only just heard from God.[11] The authors of the Mishnah spoke of this oral teaching method, as well, outlining a Torah genealogy through this method from rabbi to disciple, beginning with Moses, down to the present generation.[12]

This act of passing Jewish tradition from one generation to the next (*masarah* (מסרה)) comes from the same root as the word for the very tradition being passed down (*masorah* (מסורה)). This suggests that Jewish tradition isn't just the information in Torah, but the very

---

[1] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 114.
[2] ibid., 115.
[3] ibid., 114.
[4] Yehudah Levi, *Torah Study: A Survey of Classic Sources on Timely Issues,* trans. Raphael N. Levi (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishing, 2002), 170.
[5] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 105.
[6] see *Ruach Chaim* 3:9
[7] see *Nefesh HaChaim* 4:33
[8] see Leviticus 19:2
[9] see Exodus 33:11
[10] see *B. Ber.* 63b.
[11] *B. Er* 54b. and *En Yaakov*, ad loc; Mek, *Mishpatim, Mezikin,* 1.
[12] see *Pirkei Avot* 1:1-4

*act* of passing Torah (or Teaching) to another. Furthermore, the term Torah itself is an action-oriented, verbal noun, implying that God gave not a static, reified "teaching" to mankind, but an active "Teaching" process, instead. One principal means of passing on this Teaching is orality—the process of engaging in physically audible speech and dialogue, in person, one-on-one, face-to-face. By virtue of the Divine proximity that comes from imitating God's Sinaitic pedagogy, scripture describes orality as a sacred teaching method.

Jewish sacred texts emphasize orality as a key teaching and learning method, including in six of the forty-eight teaching and learning methods mentioned in the *Mishnah's* central pedagogic text.[1] Don't just whisper, chided the wife of one great Torah scholar to her husband's student, but speak aloud, for without audibly speaking Torah, it is liable to be forgotten forever.[2] Enunciate the words of Torah clearly, admonished Rav Judah,[3] that the words of Torah might be sweet to those who are blessed to hear them.[4] Make words of Torah sweet through speech,[5] even sing them if necessary.[6] "Speaking it out or saying things out loud," said Rav Feldman, "is always encouraged. It's also more real that way. It's an expression, as it were, of Torah in this world, as opposed to just being in your head." By bringing God's Teaching into the world through physical speech, orality is a co-creative act with God, drawing mankind closer to Him through *imitatio dei*, making it a sacred act.

Though scripture recommends teaching and learning aloud every day,[7] the importance of orality extends beyond audible speech.[8] Even at *Or Akiva,* where those of its more conservative Lithuanian background shied away from singing and dancing like those at *Merkaz David,* considered speech an educative tool of paramount importance. Yet, because of its immense power, teaching vocally was only ever to be done in "as few words as possible."[9] For as one spoke Torah, "establishing it upon the lips," as scripture says, Torah became part of one's innermost being[10]—and so sanctified teachers and learners by drawing them closer to God.

Such orality even supersedes the power and importance of the written word in this context. "Today," said *Or Akiva's* Rav Neusner, "Jews are very much considered the book worms. But if we went back thousands of years ago, almost everything would have been completely oral. The more that's written down," he continued, "the less important the words become. It's like watering down the most important part of the tradition." According to this tradition, Moses received not one Torah at Sinai, but two: one written, the other oral. The Written Torah, according to those at *Or Akiva,* was given to Moses in its entirety as a written document, comprised of the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. But God also gave Moses the Oral Torah—not as something written, nor as a body of text to be memorized, but as what the Talmud describes as "a mind to interpret and to declare."[11] By teaching mankind this way of thinking about and seeing the world, God had called mankind to teach one another Heavenly Torah "in the language of men, to men," giving His Teaching "absolutely to the judgment of the human intelligence."[12]

---

[1] see *Pirkei Avot* 6:6
[2] *B. Er* 53b-54a.
[3] *B. Er* 54a.
[4] *P. Sanh* 10:1, 28a.
[5] Exodus *Rabba* 41:5
[6] *B. Meg* 32a.
[7] *B. Sanh* 99a-b.
[8] *B. Betz* 24a.
[9] see Leviticus 11; *Deut.* 14; B. *Hul* 63b.
[10] *B. Er* 54a.
[11] see *Sif.* Numbers 134
[12] Theodore Friedman, "Oral Law" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition,* ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 12. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 456.

"That's the beauty of it," said Rav Neusner. "Everything written still has to be unzipped by either two people who have the knowledge together, or, even better, by the person who knows more teaching the person who knows less." As such, there was a necessarily human element to Torah's transmission, uniquely communicated through personified orality. "It was supposed to be a living commentary on the written text," said Rav Neusner. "The Talmud and everything else," he went on, "is not really sacred at all. It's sacred in the sense that it's dealing with Jewish law, yes, but the words themselves lose the meaning and the context and the depth." This is why, he explained, that *khavrusa* (חברותא) and the rabbi-disciple relationship are so important. "In a certain sense," he explained, "Torah is the algorithm behind the universe, and so cannot be contained in any detail within it. That's not something that you can fully grasp in just words themselves." The Oral Law, then, is holy, not because of its Sinaitic origins or the number of people who participate in it alone, but simply in the method of its transmission, embodied in those who brought God's Teaching into the world through their speech.

Because this sacred orality required at least one person to speak and another to listen, imitating God's instruction at Sinai, teaching and learning, according to *Or Akiva's* Rav Rabinovitch, "required an apprenticeship." Apprenticeship, he said, was "a workable, effective and sound approach" to realizing the sanctity inherent in the oral pedagogic process. Because Judaism was "by definition an oral tradition," he said, "there was no substitute for having seen Oral Torah in action," then "imitating, emulating and internalizing it via that apprenticeship." Not only was this method sacred, he said, but any other way of attempting to pass on the tradition would simply not work. "Where I come from," Rav Rabinovitch said," there's no such thing as a self-made man." He went on to explain:

> Let's say there's someone with a complete translation of the Talmud—a brilliant genius of a fellow, and he went through the whole Talmud several times, and now is teaching it. There's no such thing. *No such thing*. He's not equipped to teach because he doesn't have that sensitization. He doesn't have that training and that apprenticeship. You wouldn't want a genius who had read through a medical textbook several times doing open heart surgery on you, would you? He's got to see it in action. The moment arrives when you reach the truth, what's really going on. In the text, all we have is the superficialities. Most of what we do is beneath that, so you need to be with someone to know that you're doing it properly. This is something that really can't be substituted.

This apprenticeship, and especially the oral transmission of Torah within it, was something Rav Rabinovitch maintained simply could not be found elsewhere. There was simply nothing that could substitute the value and sanctity of a living person in one's physical presence, audibly bringing the words of God's Teaching to life through speech. This approach was dually sacred—both by virtue of its recommendation in Hebrew scripture, as well as its functionality in realizing education's purpose.

Furthermore, as something that cannot be expressed in writing, but only in the speech of a physically present person, God's Teaching appears extra-propositional. The Talmud supports this idea, saying that Torah can only by transmitted from living vessel to living vessel. Borrowing Polanyi's concept of personal knowledge, as "an art which cannot be specified in detail," Torah study, "cannot be transmitted by prescription, since no prescription for it exists. It can be passed on only by example from master to apprentice."[1] However, Polanyi also describes a danger inherent in this process. "This restricts the range of diffusion," he says, "to that of personal contacts." As such, when Torah "has fallen into disuse for a period of a generation, [it] is altogether lost. These losses are usually irretrievable."[2]

---

[1] Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1962), 55.
[2] ibid., 53.

Nowhere was this sense of the crucial importance and urgency of the teaching and learning endeavor more plainly manifest than in the countenance of every rabbi and student at *Or Akiva.* Like Polanyi, it was often said at *Or Akiva* that the Jewish tradition was only one generation from extinction. Regardless of whatever had been written or digitized, if only a single generation abandoned the sacred task to teach and learn, they often said, the living, sacred orality of which Rav Rabinovitch and Rav Neusner spoke would be gone, irretrievably and forever. This exigency and urgency made teaching and learning a quest. Consecrated not only as the functional means of continuing that tradition, but as the means by which God chose to initiate it, orality was doubly sacred, without which, says scripture, "Israel would be counted the same as any other nation."[1]

## *Purposive Difficulty*

*Though I wanted this question answered with all the weight of the years I had spent in search of it, perhaps the only person in the world who wanted it more than I did stood, in that very moment, right beside me, dedicating all his energy to pursuing the matter to its conclusion.*

"You must know," said Rav Elihayu, "of the sacrifice that goes on here every day." We stood together in the middle of the main house of study, and the sea of sound to which I had grown accustomed in recent months washed over us. "Everyone here is willing to die for this tradition—not just once, but to die each day anew, killing themselves in eighteen hours of grueling study *every single day*." He paused a moment to look around, admiring the chorus of shouts that filled his ears. "If that doesn't make all this sacred," he added, turning back to me with finality, "I don't know what would." We listened again to the sounds of Oral Torah swirling all around us as their echoes bounced off the vaulted ceilings and into a hundred ears made worthy of receiving such Teaching by virtue of the toil of study they were undertaking.

In the Jewish tradition, teaching and learning are not only inherently difficult,[2] but that very difficulty is what gives them consecratory power. The very work it requires is part of Torah's gift. To participate in that process and be sanctified thereby, the Talmud maintains, a man must be ready and willing to go through a grueling effort, "submitting himself like an ox to the yoke"[3] or a sleepless man to his toothache.[4] Of the purifying potential inherent in such didactic difficulty, the Psalmist once wrote, "Blessed is the man whom Thou chastenest, O Lord, by teaching him from Thy Teaching."[5]

"When the Holy One gave the Torah to Israel," says the *Tanna debe Eliyahu,* "He gave it to them as wheat out of which the fine flour of Mishnah was to be produced."[6] By the painful toil indispensable to the learning process, one ground "the wheat of the letters of Torah into the flesh and blood," not only changing it into the "bread of life,"[7] but also changing, albeit painfully, those who ground that wheat, as well. By living "a life whose conditions will cause you pain and toil in Teaching," says the Talmud, "happy you shall be in this world and the world to come."[8] Importantly, this promised happiness did not come after

---

[1] see Hosea 8:12
[2] *Pirkei Avot* 2:12
[3] B. AZ 5b.
[4] *Tanhuma B*, *Mi-ketz*, §16; *Yalkut*, Ps., §850
[5] see Psalms 94:12
[6] Tanna debe Eliyyahu, *The Lore of the School of Elijah,* trans. W.G. Braude and I.J. Kapstein (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981), 409.
[7] see David Patterson, *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2005), 164.
[8] *Pirkei Avot* 6:4

the tribulation, but, like grinding wheat[1] or churning butter,[2] it came in the midst of the trial itself.

Without such difficulty and struggle, neither rabbis nor their disciples have even the ability to understand Torah. "A man does not fully understand words of Torah," maintains scripture, "until he has stumbled over them."[3] "As for your own understanding" without engaging in the struggle of study, says another passage, "don't depend on it."[4] Teaching and learning is, again, not an inheritance to be passively waited for, but simply means hard work—an effort without which it would cease to be education altogether. "Do not suppose that Torah will seek you out," the Talmud continues, but "go as a voluntary exile to Torah itself,"[5] seeking it out by the hardship of self-initiated effort and struggle, for nothing, scripture maintains, can be learned otherwise.[6] If a man claims to have learned without hard work, or to have worked hard but learned nothing, says the Talmud "do not believe him." Only believe those who say, "I labored and learned," for there is simply no other way to do so.[7]

The Talmud further compares Torah study to striking a rock repeatedly with a hammer until either the rock or the hammer shattered with the effort. Whether Torah[8] or mankind[9] is the hammer, the imagery of pain and hardship inherent in the encounter between mankind and the Teaching of Heaven is striking. To teach and learn, one must be prepared to pass through a process "as shattering as the rain,"[10] every single day[11]—a trial so great, says scripture, it is said to leave a man's face "blackened as a Raven's by deprivation."[12] But for the one willing to go through such trials, "the Holy One will make his countenance shine,"[13] as God Himself dwells with him all along the way.[14]

The Sages told of a moment when Moses asked Israel if they knew how difficult his encounter with God at Sinai had actually been. "Are you aware," he asked, "of the pain I suffered for Torah's sake? The toil I put into it? The backbreaking labor I devoted to it, speaking there with the Lord forty days and forty nights?[15] I had to go into the midst of angels, celestial creatures, even seraphim, any one of which could incinerate the entire world, all of it. I all but gave my life for Torah." Then, in a parting thought as significant as it was daunting, "As *I* have learned it in pain," he said, "so *you* will learn it in pain."[16] However harrowing this description of teaching and learning may be, it comes with a promise. If in the educative process, teachers and learners pass through the same difficulty as Moses at Sinai, these could, in turn, be sanctified as was Moses, whose face, after the trial, shone with the light of God.[17]

Such struggle, hardship and sacrifice are the very watchwords whereby this tradition sanctifies its adherents, purifying and stretching them beyond the limits of what they believe

---

[1] *Tanna debe Eliyyahu*, 1981, p. 409
[2] *B. Ber* 63b.
[3] *B. Git* 43a.
[4] *Pirkei Avot* 4:15.
[5] ibid.
[6] see *Sif.* Deuteronomy, §307; see also *Pirkei Avot* 4:9-10
[7] *B. Meg* 6a.
[8] *TB San.* 34a.
[9] *Rabbenu Tam*, Lamentations *Rabba* 4:7
[10] see Deuteronomy 32:2
[11] *B. Er* 21b-22a; *En Yaakov*, ad loc.
[12] ibid.
[13] *B. Sanh* 100a.
[14] *Pirkei Avot* 2:14
[15] see Exodus 34:28
[16] *Sif.* Deuteronomy, §307
[17] see Exodus 34:29-35

possible. Theirs is a realm where the inherent, almost inescapable difficulty of the learning process is embraced, highlighted, even praised for what it can accomplish. Rather than beat back the tide of intellectual trial that plagues the halls of their study, they put off the world's facilitative trend and embrace instead the purifying power of the scholarly struggle of *talmud torah* (תלמוד תורה). "The constancy of uninterrupted study," said Lamm, "wedded to the intensity of intellectual concentration, yielded the quality of toil (*amal*) in Torah," which, in turn, gave man "the capacity to rise higher [even] than the angels."[1]

Teaching and learning, said the Talmud, was such a painful sacrifice that it not only replaced the temple sacrifices of ancient Israel,[2] but could even be used to attain forgiveness of sin.[3] "Whenever we are about to perform any commandment, even Torah study," said Rav Levi, "we pray, 'Blessed art Thou...who has sanctified us with the commandment...' Sanctified us how?" he asked. "Through the performance of the commandment itself." "There is the idea," said Rav Rosen, "of toiling in Torah and working hard in it, and you could almost end it at that. There is a value in engaging in the pursuit of Torah, even if at the end you don't know the answer, because you're working to get to the truth."

"Picture that there's something you really want," said Rav Weinberg. "Now flip it. See it through Heaven's eyes. God says, 'No, Isaac, my goal for you is to connect with me, and you have a limited amount of time in this world.' Now, remember," Rav Weinberg continued, "God is the Infinite Giver. He doesn't need it or want it for you at all. His goal for you is to get the most out of life, which is to be close to Him (i.e., to be holy). So, while you may say your goal is to get this or that thing, God's goal for you is to connect to Him through the trial of its pursuit. The way he gets it from you is withholding that thing," he explained, "and it works really well. To God, your troubles, struggles and sacrifices are a means to create a better connection with Him." All trials, it seemed, especially that of teaching and learning, were purposively difficult, for in that difficulty lay the seed of a closeness to God in which each of His people could, by virtue of that Divine proximity, commune with Him and eventually become like Him.

## *Imitatio Dei and Perceptual Theosimilitude*

*"If you connect with or draw near to God," he went on, "you begin to see the world—including everything and everyone in it—the way He does, through His eyes."*

It was a Wednesday afternoon, and I had taken Rabbi Schiff to lunch for his birthday. We were about the same age, and had both grown up in California, so our friendship had developed quickly during my months in Jerusalem. After well over an hour, we were just about to leave when Rav Schiff paused. Adjusting his *kippa*, he looked at me a little harder than usual, furrowing his brow as though trying to decide if I was ready for the parting comment he was about to make. Of all my questions, this last answer, though unlooked-for, was a key insight into the sanctity of Jewish education. "We are made in the image of God," he began, his normally rapid speech now uncharacteristically slow and deliberate. "This means," he went on, "that God has the ability to choose, and so do we. No other living thing has this gift," he emphasized, "but *we* do. Our ability to choose to act, perhaps even more than the act itself, has a sanctifying power that connects us to God."

---

[1] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and his Contemporaries,* 117; see also Nefesh HaChaim 1:10.
[2] *Men.* 110.
[3] *Ta'an.* 27b.

The Hebrew Bible tells of how, when God created mankind, He made them *b'tselmo* (בצלמו), "in His image."[1] In the Jewish tradition, that image was not corporeal, but spiritual,[2] connected to the heart and intellect of man. In forming man from the dust of the earth, God did not speak as He did with the rest of creation, but instead breathed *neshemat chaim* (נשמת חיים), the "breath of life," into him.[3] When He did so, tradition holds that God imparted a portion of His Divine nature to man.[4] In this Divine spark lay a dormant gift of Divine potential. This was his agency.

Such agency created a context in which God's children, by virtue of their capacity to make meaningful choices, could respond to Divine invitations with an accountability that could bring them the favor and blessings of Heaven. These invitations to exercise the Divine agentive spark within the soul came in the form of God's commandments, which invited mankind to become like God. This possibility of imitating God, or *imitatio dei,* flows out of man's having been created in God's image[5]—not in the anthropomorphic sense, but in terms of the agentive capacity whereby he could respond to invitations to do, be and ultimately become like God. As God is seen as "the ultimate role model"[6] in all these commandments, *imitatio dei* "occupies a central place in the religious and ethical thought of Judaism," and is "not merely a pious desideratum," but "an imperative"[7] of both action and disposition.

While depicting mankind's similitude to God through the lens of agency links at least a portion of *imago dei* and *imitatio dei* to the mind,[8] the authors of Jewish scripture were not "anxious about epistemological problems—in the Greek sense—concerning the Divine Being. They were, however, interested in the fervid human experience of knowing God, of being close to Him, and of serving Him."[9] Hebrew scripture posits that among the best ways to come to know God is not to study *about* Him, but to know Him in the scriptural sense of the Hebrew term *yodeah* (יודע),[10] one of whose key definitions implies the personal, experiential closeness shared between acting moral agents. This understanding of the "knowledge of God whereby man is guided towards *imitatio dei,*"[11] then, is not so much found through detached study *about* His nature and ways, but instead consists in doing what He does, and in so doing striving to be as He is. This idea of *imitatio dei* as experiential, action-oriented participation in who God is by imitating His attributes appears throughout the verbiage of the Hebrew Bible. In love for the stranger,[12] justice for the downtrodden,[13] and being father to the fatherless,[14] God is "the exemplar for human conduct."[15] *Imitatio dei* also includes developing Godlike dispositions: man must hate what God hates,[16] love what He

---

[1] see Genesis 1:27

[2] Jacob Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book*, 274-276.

[3] see Genesis 2:7

[4] Louis Jacobs, "The Doctrine of the 'Divine Spark' in Man in Jewish Sources" in *Studies in Rationalism, Judaism and Universalism*, ed. Raphael Loewe (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

[5] David Shapiro, "The Doctrine of the Image of God and *Imitatio Dei*" in *Studies in Jewish Thought, Vol. 1* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1975), 57.

[6] Hanan Alexander, "God as Teacher: Jewish Reflections on a Theology of Pedagogy," *Journal of Beliefs and Values* 22, no. 1 (2001): 5.

[7] Shapiro, *The Doctrine of the Image of God and Imitatio Dei*, 63-64.

[8] Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book*, 274-276.

[9] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 8.

[10] In Hosea 8:2, for instance, God, complaining of a people who know *about* Him, though did not live according to His commandments, asks, "Will they cry unto Me: My God, we Israel know Thee?"

[11] Shapiro, *The Doctrine of the Image of God and Imitatio Dei*, 57.

[12] see Deuteronomy 10:18-19

[13] see Isaiah 61:8

[14] see Psalms 68:6

[15] Shapiro, *The Doctrine of the Image of God and Imitatio Dei*, 58.

[16] see Deuteronomy 12:31

loves[1] and share in His perfected qualities of character.[2] Mankind's capacity to meaningfully respond to these invitations to do, be and become by virtue of the agentive "breath of life" given them by God is what gives all these commandments meaning and purpose, and so a consecratory capacity.

While all these commandments may describe parts of mankind's capacity for *imitatio dei,* none describes the entirety of that divine call as does the Levitical command, "Be ye holy, even as I am holy."[3] Not only is *imitatio dei* itself a call to holiness,[4] but the locus of the sanctity of all the commandments together. "This," says the Talmud, "is the holiness of all the commandments."[5] But again, Judaic *imitatio dei* and its corresponding holiness are not an outcome, but a process, the *telos* of all existence. Involvement in their realization is sanctity itself and, in the same spirit of *torah lishmah* (תורה לשמה), "its own end."[6] By imitating God, whose holiness is independent and unconditional,[7] one can connect to that holiness whose source He is, and be sanctified thereby. It is for this reason that, before performing any commandment, the prayer is said, "Blessed art thou, Lord, our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us with His commandments." In this sense, "Holiness," said Rabbi Abraham Ibn Ezra, "is to keep the commandments."[8]

When Moses told the children of Israel, "After the Lord your God ye shall walk," they asked, "Who can walk in His ways? Is it not written, 'A fire devoureth before Him, and round about Him it stormeth mightily?[9]'" Moses answered them, "I was not speaking of *those* ways, but of following after the *qualities* of God, instead."[10] Though Jewish tradition holds that God's nature is unreachably above that of mankind,[11] the call to be holy through the process of *imitatio dei* comes through action, which works a change upon disposition and finally elevates the nature of man to be like Him. "All the commandments of God," said Rav Tsadok ha-Kohen of Lublin, "are guides to the achievement of holiness, the supreme goal of *imitatio dei.*"[12] Occupying a central place among the commandments,[13] then, teaching and learning are an exceptional means whereby mankind can realize and embody the sanctity of *imitatio dei.*

Teaching and learning are especially potent forms of *imitatio dei* and its concomitant sanctity because God is said to actually do both every single day. "The rabbis," said Alexander, "envisioned God in their own image as a *talmid hakham*—both a student and teacher."[14] More specifically, God is said to teach His people "each and every day [as] a divine voice goes forth from Sinai" to proclaim words of Torah.[15] When some among the ancient Sages could not come to a decision in their study, they often called upon God to teach them how to proceed.[16] "When we teach," then, said Rabbi Soloveichik, "we imitate God, He

[1] see Jeremiah 9:23
[2] see Exodus 22:26
[3] see Leviticus 19:2
[4] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 7.
[5] see *Sif.* Numbers 15:41
[6] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei.*
[7] ibid.
[8] Ibn Ezra, *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Deuteronomy (Devarim)*
[9] Psalms 50:3
[10] *Tanhuma, Va-Yishlah,* 10.
[11] Isaiah 55:8-9
[12] Shapiro, *The Doctrine of the Image of God and Imitatio Dei*, 58.
[13] see *Mishnah Peah* 1:1
[14] Alexander, *God as Teacher: Jewish Reflections on a Theology of Pedagogy*, 5.
[15] *Pirkei Avot* 6:2
[16] Rawidowicz, *Israel: The Ever Dying People and Other Essays*, 136.

who teaches Torah to His people Israel."[1] "A person who is actually teaching," said *Or Akiva's* Rav Eli, "is very much being like God in one of the most profound ways possible. That's why part of being holy," he continued, "is being like God, even imitating God. That's why teaching is also inherently a holy act—inherently."

Apart from teaching, God also continues to study and learn each day Himself, despite His omniscience. "God not only studied His Torah more than a hundred times before He gave it to Moses for Israel," wrote Rawidowicz, but "God is in Midrashic Judaism the *eternal student.* He learns *with* Israel, learns always and everywhere…Rav, the leading *amora* of the second century, went even so far as to describe exactly the daily agenda of God Almighty: The first three hours of his twelve-hour day of work, God learns Torah."[2] Just as with teaching, then, one who learns is also imitating God, and in so doing takes part in His holiness. "What learning meant to traditional Judaism," continued Rawidowicz, "can probably be best inferred from the fact that the rabbis linked it up with the supreme Jewish idea, the *idea of God.*"[3] Even "the rabbis of the Talmud," said Neusner, "believed that they studied Torah as God did in Heaven; their schools were conducted like the academy on high."[4]

Among the greatest of commandments, teaching and learning are likewise among the most potent means of participating in *imitatio dei* and connecting to holiness, a primary purpose of *imitatio dei*. In this way, said Alexander, "Study and teaching, in this tradition, are holy acts."[5] This is one of the primary and most apparent dimensions of the relationship between Judaic holiness and the act of teaching and learning, namely, that one can become the type of teacher and learner that God is by consistently imitating the teaching and learning to which God dedicates Himself each day. "There are multiple ways of connecting to God," said Rav Rosen, "acting like God, imitating His ways, and that's holy. But an even more powerful way of imitating God is through Torah study. When you're studying Torah,[6] you're not just externally imitating God. You're in Him. You're getting into a much deeper way of how God sees the world."

"When man uses his mind" to teach and learn, said Neusner, "he is acting like God." Doing so not only connects man to God, thereby sanctifying him, but, "man, through reasoning in Torah's laws, may penetrate into God's intent and plan."[7] By teaching and learning, man not only imitates God, but in becoming like God can come to see the world through His eyes, in a Divinely-sanctioned Theosimilitude. "So, studying Torah (in the broad sense) is not merely imitating God," Neusner continued, "who does the same, but is a way to the apprehension of God and the attainment of the sacred. The modes of argument [inherent in Judaic pedagogy] are holy because they lead from earth to heaven, as prayer or fasting or self-denial cannot."[8] Seen in this way, the perceptual theosimilitude represents the pursuit, embodiment and attainment of sanctity in one of its most supernal forms. "Man's purpose in this world," said Rav Hirsch, "is not to strive to see God, but to strive to see the world through God's eyes. Torah, then, is the curriculum that will develop men and women whose eyes see things God's way." So, the Psalmist pled, "Open my eyes that I may see the wonders

---

[1] Abraham R. Besdin, *Reflections of the Rav: Lessons in Jewish Thought Adapted from Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1993).
[2] Rawidowicz, *Israel: The Ever-Dying People and Other Essays*, 135-136.
[3] ibid.
[4] Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book*, 275.
[5] Alexander, *God as Teacher: Jewish Reflections on a Theology of Pedagogy*, 6.
[6] Aramaic translations of *talmud torah* (תלמוד תורה) include both the concept of teaching as well as learning, united in a single term in this instance.
[7] Neusner, *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book*, 274-276.
[8] ibid.

of Thy Teaching."[1]

Just as Rav Levi said, the *Chazon Ish* hadn't learned how to do brain surgery from reading it somewhere in the Talmud, but in the midst of His sacred toil in Torah, he had come to see the world through Heaven's eyes. It was through this very perceptual theosimilitude, some said, that he saw how to help guide the doctor who would do his disciple's brain surgery—not because of any passage he had read, but because he had begun to see from the perspective of Him who knew all things, even something as extra-scriptural as the physiology of the brain. In the Jewish educative tradition, it was God's promise to the diligent that, if those who studied Torah remained faithful, it would be theirs to see the world as He saw it—not at the end of all things, but in the midst of their study. And so, while students of the Teaching never became God themselves, theirs was the privilege of seeing the world through His eyes, first as a consecratory awareness, and then, together with their agentive pursuit of further light and knowledge, as the very vision of God's eyes alight in their own.

## Summary

This chapter's first themes highlighted the capacity of lived remembrance, human volition and intent to consecrate the temporal dimension of the Judaic educative endeavor, not only bringing ancient hierophanies (such as the revelation at Sinai) into the present, but unifying the finitude of mortal time with the Divine infinitude of eternity. Next, the chapter focused on how educative methods are not primarily sanctified by a connection to God as Author of those methods, but instead by their capacity to realize the Divine purpose of Jewish education generally, namely, that those who teach and learn may become like God by perpetually participating in that process. Orality was then shown to be one such method, consecrated not by its Divine authorship, but by its imitation of God's teaching and its transformational capacity to make mankind more like their Creator.

Further exploring the transformative capacity of education's sanctification, the following section described how the inherent difficulty of Judaic teaching and learning, far from being a detriment to be overcome, was, as a form of sacrifice, the very locus of education's power to sanctify its participants. The temporal, purposive, sacrificial and participatory dimensions of education's sanctity all served as a foundation for the chapter's final theme, which described how the pursuit of holiness, especially through teaching and learning, served a single, overarching purpose: that man might become like God. Teaching and learning were shown to be sacred acts inasmuch as they possessed, in the process of their perpetual, lived realization, the capacity to aid mankind in its pursuit of *imitatio dei,* to become not just connected to sanctity's Source, but like that Source themselves.

[1] Psalms 119:18

# CHAPTER SIX: AMONG HOLY MEN

It was my last day in Jerusalem, and I was late.

I had rushed across town to class that morning, but when I arrived, pausing a moment to catch my breath, it hit me. This *was* my last day in Jerusalem: the last time I would wander those streets, the last time I would walk through that door, and, most of all, the last time I would hear those lessons and greet those people who had come to mean so much more to me than what research could describe, whatever the method. Their way of learning demanded that of me, and of everyone. These were my *khaverim* (חברים)—my friends, my brothers. I just wasn't ready. Not yet.

For just inside, I knew, that brotherhood of study was already gathered, doing the one thing they treasured above all else. After so many weeks of striving to belong to that brotherhood, I realized that day that slowly, almost imperceptibly, maybe I had.

The sun hadn't risen high enough to cast its rays in the narrow passage where I stood, waiting just outside the entrance to *Osher Shlomo*.

Just one more minute, I thought. At that hour, Rav Simcha would have already begun his morning lesson while his groggy students, each armed with a steaming cup of coffee, fought the urge to doze amidst the sleepy lull of his mellow voice.

Standing outside, I ran my fingers along the gilded Hebrew letters above the door. To any other, it might have seemed ordinary, but to me it had been home, at least for a while.

The letters had long since faded, and though I had to lean in close to read them, their message was as clear as the day they were written:

ישבת אושר שלמה
*Yeshivat Osher Shlomo*—The School of Solomon's Joy

For every word of scripture, it was said that Solomon understood nine thousand layers of meaning. How fitting, I thought, that Solomon's name should adorn this sacred threshold. For just inside, I knew, the heirs of his legacy had already taken up his mantle that morning, like thousands of other mornings like it, to exhaust themselves, toiling in the same Torah into whose depths Solomon the king had daily plunged three thousand years before.

And so it was that, one last time, I placed my hand on that heavy, iron door, took a deep breath, and pushed. The slow screech of the hinges broke the reverent silence in which my friends listened to the Rav, and though their rapt attention vanished in an instant, Rav Simcha continued in his slow, measured way, losing neither the cadence of his speech nor the focus of the thought behind it.

In the midst of that slow, steady rhythm by which he held his disciples captive, our eyes met, if only for an instant, before he turned to look at the others, one by one. As he continued, an almost imperceptible half smile formed behind his scraggly beard as he gave a warm greeting with a wave of his hand, then beckoned me to come in and find a seat.

He was telling a story, as he did every morning, and though I hadn't caught the beginning, its magic had already begun to work on all who listened, even on the room itself.

We met in a synagogue—one of the oldest in an already ancient neighborhood, and it was small. Even without the furniture and books that covered nearly every square inch of the walls and floor, there would have barely been enough room for a dozen to sit comfortably.

But the space was far from bare and, from the look of things, hadn't been for time immemorial.

It's only door swung inward, narrowly missing the altar that stood in the room's exact middle, whose single, ancient step, once straight and level, now sagged in its middle, worn nearly back to the ground by the feet of countless faithful as they stood, chanting the music of prayers beyond count.

Built in the Sephardi style, a thread of Judaism that ran from Spain to North Africa, its benches were not in rows, one in front of another, but in a single square, pressed up against the walls, that all might see alike, face to face.

Across from its only door, beyond the central altar, lay the synagogue's most sacred relic: the *etz khaim* (עץ חיים), or Tree of Life, inside whose hallowed doors lay the Torah scroll—the unmoved guardian of their inheritance from Sinai, reverenced beyond price and time. It was kept behind a veil of red velvet, laced with delicate gold thread, carefully stitched into fruits, trees, crowns and a bold, intricate lettering, beyond which, on every side, hung ornate, copper lamps, tarnished here and there where fire and frankincense once burned.

Despite its quiet splendor, the Torah scroll was only a drop in the ponderous ocean of sacred stuff that left the place without so much as an inch to spare. Marked by an unmistakable aura of purposive disarray, books and papers were strewn about in haphazard testimony of the otherworldly focus in which they worked.

Such was every square inch of *Osher Shlomo.*

The marble walls, which cooled the room in Jerusalem's hot summer months, could only just be seen through the myriad trinkets that adorned them. Intricate, oak-framed placards hung from floor to ceiling, filled with names of Sages past. Above each glowed a single electric candle, its dim, artificial light faintly flickering in remembrance of a forgotten name.

Strewn here and there among these antiquities too, lay a smattering of the modern. An electric fan lay askew from the ceiling, its blades listlessly spinning between ancient lamps as its chord meandered aimlessly between placards and bookshelves to reach the nearest outlet. And in one inconspicuous corner sat a tiny, antique refrigerator, covered in plastic spoons and an outmoded tea kettle.

Most striking of all, though, were the books. Leather-bound books of every shape and size imaginable sat stuffed into shelves filled to bursting. Row upon row of hastily stacked tomes sat propped up against ramshackle pillars of still more books, wobbling in the wake of the hasty focus on other matters that had absentmindedly put them there.

Apart from its ancient benches and a few rickety lecterns, the room's only piece of furniture was a simple, rectangular folding table, draped in a faded tablecloth covered in clear plastic. Somehow, it gave the synagogue's chaotic décor a homey feel, as though he who sat behind it bid you welcome without ever having to say so.

In short, this was a holy place—sanctified by the teaching and learning brought to life within.

In the midst of all this sanctity, and at Rav Simcha's invitation, I squeezed through what little space remained to hear what remained of his lesson. I opened my notebook, flipped to its few remaining pages and listened in earnest.

Before too long, Shimon handed me a copy of the book the Rav was reading—a book about Passover. With a characteristic zeal and attention to detail, we scrutinized even the most insignificant details of the day's rituals—not to know *about* them, but to know how to *do* them. For Passover wasn't a modern holiday, but an ancient holy-day, a time to give up play for prayer, recreation for remembrance and the mundane for sanctity.

After some time, during a lull in Rav Simcha's lesson, a friend beside me asked, "Rabbi, how can I get more out of Passover? What can I *do* to understand its mysteries?"

Rav Simcha paused and furrowed his brow, letting his eyes close as he sat deep in thought. After a moment of expectant silence, he looked up and, as was his way, told a story in answer.

"Long ago, two friends studied together in *khavrusa* (חברותא) every day," he began. "And as time passed, their toil in Torah turned their friendship to brotherhood."

As he spoke, the singular focus with which we listened was potent— almost tangible in its unmistakable realness. The power of story had already begun to work a change within us.

"After some years," he went on, "one of the friends married, and after only a few months of bliss, their marriage was marred by strife and malcontent."

"One day, as the two old friends sat together in *yeshiva,* poring over another page of sacred writ, the one newly-married surrendered to his mounting frustrations."

"'I can't go on like this,' he shouted in desperation. 'I can't even concentrate on Torah!'"

"Full of concern, his friend asked him what was the matter. 'My wife demands I help around the house!' he said. 'Can you believe it? She wants me to take time out of *my* studies every day to sweep and mop the floors! My obligation is to study, and to study alone. It is not for me to do such work'"

"So, his friend began asking him questions. When did he wake up each morning? Did his wife work outside the home? When was she away? How far away from their home was the well to fetch water?"

"The married man, sidetracked by his frustration, took little notice of the questions and answered them all. When the interrogation came to an end, he went home, dejected at the thought of an entire day wasted, lost to the simple matter of cleaning a floor."

Then Rav Simcha paused to let the story sink in. It certainly did. For many of those listening were newly married themselves. For them, fumbling through the uncertainties of a young marriage was only too real, and their sympathetic anguish for this fictional brother in dire marital straits played poignantly on their heartstrings.

This, of course, was precisely what Rav Simcha intended. Not only did he know hundreds of stories, but he knew to whom he told them, and that made all the difference. This story hadn't been chosen at random. This story was for them, even about them. In some ways, this story *was* them.

"But the next day," he continued, "when the two met to study once more, the old focus had returned, and the married friend, forgetting all about the day before, never once lost the thread of his concentration."

"When the day had drawn to a close, the married man turned to his friend. 'When I went home yesterday,' he said with a smile, 'I found the floors freshly swept and mopped—and there was peace in our home again. I thought you should know.'"

"His friend smiled, content in knowing that his study partner was at peace, and that he would be himself again."

"Forty years passed in much the same way, the two men delving more deeply into Torah's mysteries with each passing day. But all too soon this happy arrangement came to an end when the married man's friend and lifelong study partner passed away quietly in the night, alone in his home."

"Beside himself with grief, the one remaining friend would not return to his studies. For him, the period of mourning was almost more than he could bear."

"When the day of the funeral finally came, he stood alone, far from the crowd gathered to remember his friend. As he stood, thoughts of their last session of study returned to his mind with startling clarity. One passage, as it came, sank from his mind to his heart in an instant."

"'When a man teaches Torah to his neighbor's son,' they had read together only a few days before, 'Scripture speaks of him as though he had begotten him.'[1]

"Forged in the fires of forty years in Torah, he and his friend had become brothers to which the blood bonds of kinship could simply not compare."

"He was suddenly shaken from his mournful musings by a figure who, approaching swiftly through the gathered mourners, he quickly recognized as his wife. 'Listen,' she said, 'I know you've been mourning, but we've got a house to run. After forty years of never missing a day...'"

"Shaking off his somber thoughts, he replied, 'What do you mean that I've 'never missed a day in forty years'?'"

[1] *B. Sanh.* 19b.

"'Ever since our first fight about helping around the house, you've been sweeping and mopping the floor every day of our marriage. It's one of my favorite things about you.'"

"Forgetting the funeral altogether, he responded. 'I'm sorry to have to tell you,' he said, 'but I've never swept or mopped our floor in all our forty years of marriage—not even once.'"

"Shocked, his wife let her hands fall to her side, crestfallen at her husband's confession."

"'I thought it was *you* who cleaned our floors all these years,' he said. 'That was one of my favorite things about *you*—that even though we had fought about it all those years ago, you made this quiet sacrifice every day without my ever having to ask for it.'"

"'Well then,' said his wife, exasperated, '*someone's* been cleaning our floors for *forty years*, and for whatever reason, they stopped just a few days...'"

"All at once, they understood. With chilling clarity, the man remembered that conversation with his friend so many years before: how he had gone to study after their argument, how he had found himself unable to focus and how his friend had graciously listened to his woes."

"He realized then for the first time that his friend's questions hadn't been commiserating, but carefully planned to find out exactly when his home would be empty so that he could sweep and mop his floors himself, and this for no other reason than lovingkindness for a friend."

As the story ended, Rav Simcha, like a luthier tightening the strings of a violin, waited as our expectant silence grew by the moment. And so, when our heartstrings were ready, he played them, and played expertly.

"If you would know the mysteries of Passover," he began, "I will tell you what you must do. Just beyond Agrippas Street lives a young widow who, still expecting her firstborn, lost her husband only too recently. In a tiny room just above the marketplace, she waits out the days until the birth of her son, working frantically all the while that he might find some comfort when he arrives.

"If you would know the mysteries of Passover," he said, "go, find out where she lives, and whether she ever finds out, sweep and mop her floor."

"As *khazal* (חז״ל) tell us," he said, "*gadol shimush torah yoter m'limudah*—Torah's use is greater than its study."[1]

And with that, he closed his book, and whether by some unspoken signal or an ingrained acquaintance with the day's routine, those who had listened so intently to his story only a moment before suddenly dispersed, all at once occupied by a thousand things to do before the next lesson began.

In the midst of it all, Rav Simcha got up, cheerfully glanced around the place, linked his hands quietly behind his back and strolled out of the bustling room on a morning walk to his home next door—close enough to keep a watchful eye on the students under his care. I silently hoped I would see him again that day, at least one last time before leaving.

---

[1] *Berakhot* 7b.

Just before he walked past the doorway and out of sight, as though he had heard my silent wish, he turned. “Isaac,” he said, looking through the crowd to where I sat across the little room. “Good to see you this morning.”

Then, he was gone.

As I closed the book Bertie had given me, Yosi stood up and came quickly to greet me. It had been some time since I had last seen him, and the smile on his face at noticing me among the crowd put a smile on my own.

He walked over and shook my hand. Then, by Sephardi custom, he lifted the hand he had used to shake my own to his lips, kissed it, and uttered a familiar greeting. “*Shalom* (שלום),” he said, “Peace.”

To say one of the names of God (*shalom*—שלום) while kissing the hand was a sign of respect, an acknowledgement that in greeting another made in the image of God, one might encounter His Presence and see a piece of His holiness reflected in the face of a brother.

Then, almost as quickly as he had come, Yosi left and, wrapping himself in a shawl, began his morning prayers.

Unlike other *yeshivas, Osher Shlomo* was not meant for the ordinary student, determined to study hard while there, only to return to an old life once finished. This, instead, was a school for those in pursuit of the rabbinate, that one day they might pass the tradition to those who awaited them, eager to receive, in the many generations to come.

Only a small number of men made it into this group, and gathered each day to learn at the feet of an even smaller group of rabbis. But their elite number wasn’t marred by strife or the bitterness of competition. Theirs was a brotherhood, bound in bonds forged in the fires of Torah. And as they drew ever closer to that fire, they drew ever closer to each other.

But unlike Yosi, not everyone was praying that morning. While he stood at the central altar, head covered, rocking back and forth as he read from the small leather prayerbook he held close to his face, the synagogue had become a hive of activity.

Shimon, a short, broad-shouldered man with a trimmed white beard and a hand-knit *kippa,* left to buy snacks for the lessons that would occupy the rest of that morning. Giving me a quick high-five, he slipped nimbly out the door on his way to the nearby outdoor market, by then already filled with people scrambling to make their last purchases before the sundown that marked the beginning of Sabbath.

A high five may have been less formal than Yosi’s celestial “*Shalom*,” but Shimon was a little less formal than most. He made the nearly two-hour journey from his home in Beer Sheva every morning to Rav Simcha’s class, staying late into the evening before trekking home to his wife, only to rise early the next morning to do it all again. But he came just the same. His big heart and jolly demeanor had endeared him to all of us, and for a place that had come to feel like home, it was worth the trip.

As he left, I noticed Dov shoot him a kindly but earnest look that clearly meant, “You had better hurry back.” Shimon and Dov were a *khavrusa* (חברותא), and of all the students, Dov was by far the most diligent, and Shimon perhaps the most easily distracted.

As he sat where Rav Simcha had led the lesson mere moments before, he opened a large tome of the Babylonian Talmud and began to read, consulting commentaries and translations in books stacked haphazardly about him.

His prayers finished, Yosi began studying with Eli, his *khavrusa* (חברותא). Shouting in spurts of Hebrew, English and Aramaic, they gestured wildly with their hands, arguing over the finer points of a law whose intricacies lay spelled out in the pages before them.

Their voices mingled, in turn, with that of Benyamin, which could just be heard reciting his morning prayers as Yosi had done only moments before. As he stood at the central altar, Benyamin swayed back and forth, facing south toward the site of Jerusalem’s ancient temple where, so the rabbis say, a piece of Divine holiness still dwelt on earth.

Suddenly, Shimon came back from the market, smiling, grasping bags filled to the brim with popcorn, cookies, soda and cake—snacks for all of us, prepared against the grueling lessons that were sure to come.

He rummaged through them and, grabbing a bag of chocolate cookies, sat down next to Dov who, having never lost his focus, sat waiting for him.

Opening his copy of the Talmud, Shimon began to read. As he nibbled on his chocolaty treats, always careful to turn the page with a different hand than the one covered in crumbs, he playfully shook the bag in front of Dov’s face, jingling the cookies within.

“That’s one of those things,” Shimon said, “Eating.”

“Yea,” said Dov, never taking his eyes off the text spread before him, but somehow managing to grab three or four for himself. “We’re eating Torah.”

I nodded, then grabbed a cookie for myself.

Meanwhile, Yosi and Eli shouted in the corner while Benyamin swayed, rapidly uttering the morning’s prayers under his breath.

Just then, as I reached for another cookie, the door swung open, and in its vacant space stood two men who simply couldn’t have been more different from one another if they tried.

The first was tall and very thin, with red-brown hair under a dark blue *kippa.* He wore a dark green, button-up shirt tucked into a pair of black trousers. His sleeves were rolled up, and the top button of his shirt was undone (he wasn’t wearing a tie).

“Shalom, Rav Yonatan!” several voices called out, happy to see that their next teacher had arrived for the late-morning lesson. Yosi and Eli’s arguing had ceased, Benyamin had finished his prayers, and Shimon and Dov shot furtive glances between the newcomers and their cookies, wondering if they would want to share.

But the cheer that rang out when we saw who stood behind Rav Yonatan made our first greeting seem feeble.

“Dani!” we all shouted together, laughing as we all went to greet him. Like Yosi, he, too, had been away, and we had missed our friend.

Though not so tall as Rav Yonatan, Dani was taller than most. It took only one look to see that Dani spent most of his time outside, working the land, hiking trails or meeting interesting people for no other reason than to hear their stories. His dark brown hair and beard fell past his shoulders, and he smiled so sincerely that we half expected him to burst out laughing or singing at any moment.

Instead of a shirt and trousers, he wore a tie-dyed pair of coveralls; and instead of a *kippa,* a black and yellow sombrero.

From my very first day at *Osher Shlomo*, Dani had treated me with a kindheartedness that I could hardly make sense of. And when I asked him for an interview, he told me that, though he would be gone for some time, I might enjoy his book. Following his instructions, I had bought a copy at a local burrito shop—the last in a stack they kept beside the beans.

Rav Yonatan never called us to order. He simply began, trusting that our desire to learn would pull us to him as we fell silent to listen, all of our own accord.

And so it was that day, for suddenly, in this midst of so many meetings and greetings, he began to sing. It was a song without words, chanted low and solemn in a scale and style I had never heard before.

Then, one by one, those who had gathered to hear Rav Yonatan’s late morning lesson joined in the haunting melody. And as our “oy, yoy, yoy’s” grew in strength, the song began to change, though the melody remained as it was. Gone was the somber tone in which it had begun, and in its place was heard a longing for higher things—things to lift instead of mourn—to weep with joy instead of sorrow.

Suddenly, pulled as if by magic out of the melodious air that surrounded us, a guitar appeared in Yosi’s hands, and he began to strum. And as he strummed, the song changed again. Singing the same notes by which Rav Yonatan had called us, we sang louder still.

As we did, two voices rose high above the rest, soaring into the melody’s higher octave as they sang, embellishing the tune as they went. They belonged to Dani, with his remarkably clear tenor voice, and Dov, who worked as a cantor whenever he could pull himself away from his studies.

Slowly, after many variations, the song ebbed to its inevitable close. As we slowed our pace and lowered our voices, Rav Yonatan’s voice rose to the forefront. And as we listened louder than we sang, we became suddenly aware that he was not singing as we had done, without words, but had begun to teach as he sang, adding words from the passage of Talmud that we were meant to study that very morning.

When the song had ended, Rav Yonatan sang only a few more lines alone before beginning to bend his voice into that peculiar style of sing-song chant in which many *Chassidic* scholars

read the Talmud. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, we found ourselves engrossed in conversation as Rav Yonatan simply spoke to us in a tone and cadence like any other. Our transition from waiting to learning had been seamless, composed of a journey in emotions and song that seemed to catch us in its spell until our enchantment at the music and our desire to learn worked in tandem, every mind and heart longing to participate in the teaching and learning sure to come.

Rav Yonatan's way of teaching was entirely unlike the sagely method that Rav Simcha had used that morning. Rather than share timeless tales of *Chassidic* lore to answer the questions of a spellbound listener, Rav Yonatan invited his pupils to reason together with him, developing a level and quality of critical thinking theretofore entirely unknown to them. By daily participating in the almost excruciatingly meticulous analysis characteristic of Talmudic study, it was Rav Yonatan's intent that he and his pupils wouldn't just learn the skills of discernment, but instead become more discerning people themselves.

His was the task of pulling from within them a level of evaluation and scrutiny that was, from his perspective, part of their heritage, and so part of who they were. And as they placed their trust in Rav Yonatan's knowledge of their inherent, though dormant potential, they learned, reaching out to grasp a hand extended not in condescension, but with an understanding of who they really were, or could be, with just a little help.

Before reading a passage, Rav Yonatan would always begin with, "Says the *Gemara...*" Never treated like a static document, written in a dead language and filled with rules to be memorized and cast aside, Jewish scripture was a touchstone—a gateway into the past whereby those today with eyes to see could pierce the veil of time to sit side by side with the ancient Sages themselves to bask in their teaching and learning.

In all my time at school, tangents had always seemed like something to be avoided in favor of focus and order. But in Rav Yonatan's class, tangents were fuel to the fire of Torah. And though the tangled knots of our discussion seemed haphazard and chaotic, somewhere among them lay a single, anchoring thread that brought them all together, and of which none but Rav Yonatan himself was totally aware.

Then Rav Yonatan, as quietly and imperceptibly as he had moved from song to speech at the start of his lesson, began to read, and ask others to read, the argument of the Sages as recorded in the Talmud. There was, Rav Yonatan later told me, no other religious text quite like it. Whereas most religious texts tended to conceal any mistakes that accompanied its writing, the authors of the Talmud made no attempt to hide the mistakes and arguments of the Sages. For its purpose was to illustrate not a clean-cut set of unquestionable rules, but the rigorous process by which the Sages had arrived at them.

Because of its strong focus on process and practice, those who read the Talmud weren't meant to be receivers of an ancient code of law, but participants in a living dialogue, conversing, as it were, as partners in learning and study with the ancient Sages who were its first authors.

Those who studied at *Osher Shlomo,* however, were no beginners, trying their hand at basic scriptural exegesis for the first time. No, these were men who'd spent their lives in Torah study, about to become teachers of the Law themselves.

Perhaps most surprising of all was Dani. He had been gone so long that I had nearly forgotten how well he read ancient Hebrew. It would have been easy to let his tie-dyed coveralls and gaudy black and yellow sombrero (complete with gold sequins) deceive you into dismissing him as a friendly, but less than competent student. But as Rav Yonatan called for someone to read, Dani volunteered, took a deep breath, and read the mingled Hebrew and Aramaic with a fluency and ease that left me speechless, his skill made all the more striking against his sequined sombrero.

Before long, though we had never agreed on a single solution, the lesson drew to a close. But here at *Osher Shlomo,* it wasn't about consensus. "The Gemara," taught Rav Yonatan, "is the only sacred text filled with dissenting opinions. It's not just a collection of finished products and answers. It shows *how those answers were reached*. It's messy."

He let that sink in. "Now, studying something like that," he said, "is different from studying a simple list of facts. This," he said, lifting the heavy tome that lay before him, "this teaches us not just the answers, but *how to be the kind of people who can reach those answers, too*."

Each time Dani expertly read from the written remnants of those ancient disputes, the posthumous presence of scholars past filled the room, igniting and inspiring more dialogue and debate than before. And while most of these sagely interjections were received with considerable gravity, others among the ancient voices present were called into question almost immediately. Their reverence for Torah wasn't one of quiet solemnity, but of the deepest and most intense level of scrutiny of which its adherents were capable.

As the lesson came to a close, Rav Yonatan stood up, slipped an ancient volume off a teetering shelf, and began to read as a sea of shouts and study swirled all about him. How telling, I thought, to see him return so quickly back to learning—not to treasure up knowledge for himself, but so that, when called upon the next day, he had be able to teach them once again.

For those at *Osher Shlomo*, the purpose of learning wasn't to earn a hermitish lifestyle at the end of a life of scholarly isolation. It was, instead, to receive light in order to share light and in the midst of that Divine proximity, be filled with His holiness.

Though he sat, reading quietly in a corner, Rav Yonatan never stopped being their teacher. His were the only feet that had already trod the path he now invited his disciples to walk with him. And as they walked together Heavenward, Rav Yonatan took upon himself the mantle of the Eternal Teacher—in method, in disposition, in purpose. So sacred a role, scripture maintained, could never be abdicated.

I soon found myself sitting beside Shimon again, who shot me a knowing wink. "I guess the educational philosophy here," he said, "is just do it over and over again."

Nodding in silent agreement, Dov inclined his head and read the passage for the second time that day. Theirs wasn't some simple repetition drummed up because they couldn't understand the first time, but a method informed by scripture. "Search it and search it again," said Ben Bag Bag, "for everything is in it. And in it you should look, and grow old and be worn in it, and from it do not move, since there is nothing greater than it."[1]

[1] *Pirkei Avot* 5:22

Theirs was an eternal pursuit, made timeless by those before and endless by those to come. And so, they read it a third time.

As I listened, something happened then that I did not expect. In the midst of that reading, I, the most unlikely among us, had finally understood. All at once, the meticulous logic of this ancient argument dawned upon my understanding. I read the passage again and again, scanning the words, unable to suppress the thrill of understanding that filled my heart.

My countless hours of study in the months and years preceding that moment, Rav Gadi would say, made space within me for the almost tangibly discernible light of knowledge that then rested upon my heart. And as it poured in, I caught a brief glimpse of that light which Shimon and Dov had been trying to tell me about all along.

Such light and understanding, "cannot, strictly speaking, be taught," said Otto. "It can only be evoked, awakened in the mind. There is only one way to help another to an understanding of it," he continued. "He must be guided...until he reach the point at which 'the numinous' in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness."[1]

I don't exactly recall what it was I learned that day. But I do remember how I felt as I participated firsthand in the meaningful act of understanding. Whatever singularity manifest itself that day, it had been made so by the effort that marked the way before, the understanding of the present and, most of all, the living remembrance thereafter.

"We're way behind" Dov said aloud, in a voice tinged with frustration.

"Way behind?" asked Rav Yonatan.

Unbeknownst to us, Rav Yonatan had finished reading in the corner and begun to rove around the room, listening in on lively discussions, pausing here and there to ask and answer questions of special import.

Startled, Dov jumped, spinning quickly around only to see Rav Yonatan smiling down at him.

"Don't worry about time so much," he said. "I would say we have all the time in the world, but we have more—we have eternity."

"Don't worry," he said reassuringly, grasping Dov's shoulder. "You're learning. You're..."

But he never finished his sentence. For the large iron door at the synagogue's entrance creaked slowly open, and in walked our next lesson.

It was Rav Eliyahu.

I first saw him weeks before as he walked into a classroom, chatting excitedly with a student in fluent Russian. Taking a seat at the head of our table, he said goodbye to the first student, then picked up a lively conversation with another, this time, in German.

---

[1] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 7.

Moments later, he turned to me and asked, in impeccable Hebrew, "*Eize safa ata ma'adif?* (איזה ספה אתה מעדיף)—Which language do you prefer?"

"*Anglit* (אנגלית)," I replied. "English."

"English?" he said. "Very well."

All this flashed before my mind as I watched his frail, stooped figure make its way slowly across the threshold, being sure to kiss the *mezuzah* (מזוזה), where the one-word command he had come that day to fulfill—to teach—lay written on a tiny piece of sacred parchment within.

As he entered, he held only a short stack of freshly-printed papers in one hand, and nothing more. No notes encumbered him, not even a cell phone. His command of the Jewish tradition didn't *accompany* him—*it was simply part of him*. And though his manner was plain, even casual at times, his quiet confidence took my breath away.

At last, he sat, handed out the freshly printed papers he had prepared for us, and began.

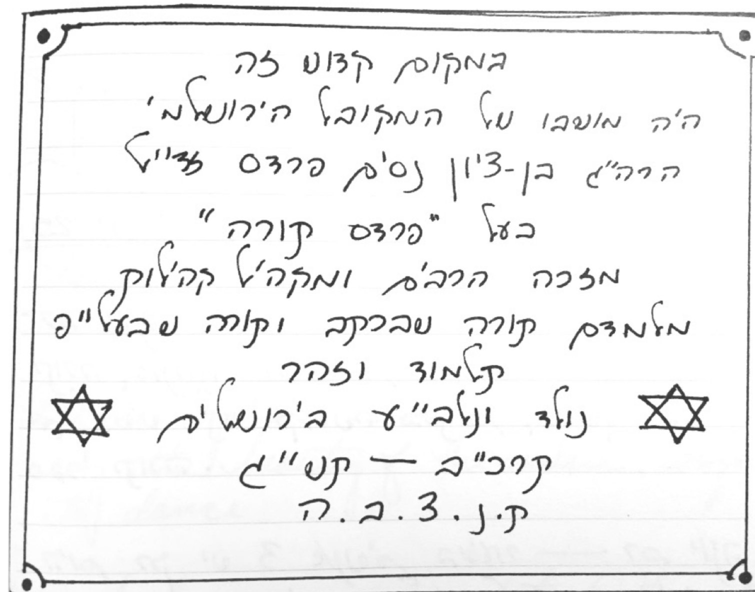
"The last time we met," he said, "many of you had questions about the commandment to get drunk on *Purim* (פורים). So, I decided to assemble a variety of rulings made over the centuries on the subject," he said, a chuckle escaping through his smiling teeth, "then let you decide."

This was precisely his way. He wasn't teaching us Talmud as much as he was teaching us to be like him—to see things the way he does.

As I listened to Rav Eliyahu outline his lesson, I suddenly noticed that he was sitting precisely where Rav Simcha and Rav Yonatan had taught earlier that morning.

Above the place hung a single plaque, neatly carved and well-lit from above. So beautiful was the ornate Hebrew lettering carefully etched along its surface that I began to copy it by hand as best I could.

Words popped out at me as I read and copied: *kadosh* (קדוש) – holy, *nesim* (נסים) – miracles and *ba'al pardes Torah* (בעל פרדס תורה) – master of the interpretation of Torah.




But it was its very first line that caught my eye. "*B'makom kadosh zeh* (במקום קדוש זה)," it read, "In this holy place"—made so not by some miraculous theophany or elaborate ceremony, but by the painstaking efforts of a man whose consecrated scholarship had made the place sacred. That sanctity wasn't conceptual, but lived—realized in and through the agentive moment when teaching became a teacher, and learning became a learner.

And now, in that same place, there sat another, renewing the sanctity of that spot by the teaching and learning personified in him.

As he walked us through passages in Hebrew, Aramaic and even Yiddish, we realized again, as we did every time Rav Eliyahu taught, that the topic at hand was not as straightforward as we had hoped.

"Any topic worthy of discussion," he began, "can never be complete."

The rulings we read, which spanned thousands of years, approached the topic of ritual drunkenness from every angle imaginable. Some called it an obligation, others a tradition. There were even those who advocated its prohibition altogether.

But in the midst of all these seeming contradictions, there remained a single thread that connected them all—a thread which Rav Eliyahu unraveled before us.

Long before the time of Rav Eliyahu, the Sages had often described Torah as a diamond whose many facets would, when turned again and again, reveal new facets of truth. *Shiv'im panim l'torah* (שבעים פנים לתורה), they called it: the seventy faces of Torah.

And so Rav Eliyahu lifted the seventy-faced Torah-diamond before our gaze, turning it here and there that we might see its multifaceted gleam all the clearer. In this personal, lived experience, we came to see Torah through Rav Eliyahu's eyes, and so became a little more like him.

But the price of doing so was not for the faint of heart. So rigorous, so thorough was it, that it left us feeling as though we had run a marathon.

Perhaps that was why Shimon had bought so many snacks.

To help us along that toilsome journey, Rav Eliyahu had invited us to walk in his shoes, see through his eyes, and channel the perspective of one who walked only a little further down the road we ourselves were on. Of all the resources arrayed before us, he, the living, breathing teacher who sat before us in that moment, was the only one who had ever been in our shoes. The books we read, the songs we sang, even the very methods we used—none of them had ever been students themselves.

But Rav Eliyahu had. No matter how unattainable his wisdom and stature may have seemed to us then, there was a time when he had been just as we were, students at the start of a road with no end, in desperate need of guidance from one who had gone on before, and who knew the way.

Such was the role of the teacher: to seek after the Divine spark hidden within each of those he taught and, once found, uncover, nourish, and invite it to grow.

Then, when the hour was gone and Shimon's snacks all eaten, he stopped. Having walked in his shoes and seen through his eyes for what had been the longest, most arduous hour of the day, it was then ours to choose what to do with the burden of truth so carefully laid upon our shoulders.

"Rav Eliyahu," I asked, stopping him as he was about to leave. "Have you considered my question from a few weeks ago? Do you know what holiness is?"

His kindly eyes turned suddenly serious, even a little sad. "I've thought about your question a great deal," he replied, "and..."

He sighed, looking down at the floor before returning his gaze to mine.

"...I cannot help you."

Turning around, he shuffled out the door, through the alleyway and out into the Jerusalem sunshine.

My heart sank. If Rav Eliyahu couldn't' help me, I thought, who could?

As my eyes wandered for a moment, I realized that Dov, who I thought had been studying, had seen the whole thing. Our eyes met, if only for a moment, and though he never said a word, his look was unmistakable.

"I'm sorry," it said.

But that moment of compassion passed in an instant as Yosi, Benyamin and Dani pushed their way between us, beckoning everyone as they went. "Come on," they said, "we're going to be late."

We had one last lesson to attend that afternoon. Just next door in Rav Simcha's living room, there waited Rav Ezra and the lesson we would share together.

Rav Simcha was a wise old storyteller, the stories of his own life melding together in harmony with the endless treasure trove of *Chassidic* tales that decades of teaching had wrought indelibly upon his heart.

Rav Yonatan was young, almost our age, and stirred us to converse with sacred texts as though their authors were living amongst us.

Rav Eliyahu's dazzling intellect and rigorous scholarship left us all inspired to study more diligently and read more broadly, that we might one day realize the higher, transformative purpose of education his teaching represented.

And though Rav Ezra shared some things in common with his fellow rabbis, he possessed a character and style of teaching all his own. His focus was mysticism and the secrets that lay hidden beyond the deepest levels of Torah knowledge.

This was what we hoped for as we walked only a few steps down the alley, through the garden, and under the ornate limestone archway that led to the entrance of Rav Simcha's home. To the right, just a few paces inside, the room opened into a vaulted ceiling whose pattern and design recalled the Crusader architecture so prominent throughout the Old City.

Its walls were covered with more books even than those at the synagogue next door. Three tables sat in the shape of a large "T," with Rav Ezra seated at the far end, already waiting, eager to begin.

He wore the black suit and white shirt of an Orthodox *Chassid*, and spoke with a raspy intensity, articulating every word as though he had just finished a bar of dark chocolate.

Yet, despite the unmistakable passion behind every moment of his teaching, he always took time to listen to anyone with a question, no matter how simple, often pausing for alarmingly long periods before articulating an answer.

As I crossed Rav Simcha's humble threshold, the unique privilege of being there suddenly dawned upon my understanding. To be in a home, instead of a synagogue, was a special honor, for it was in the home, and not the synagogue, where the holiest teaching and learning took place. This, I realized, was the closest I would ever come to experiencing the supernal sanctity of home, family and education among them.

And so it was that, seated together in this familial *sanctum sanctorum*, Rav Ezra began.

"Long ago," he said, "a travelling fiddler came to a certain village and, taking his violin from its case, began to play in the town square. The music was beautiful, his melody transcendent, but no one came to listen, and he played on, alone."

"At last, there appeared before him a solitary figure, running from the village outskirts, to hear the dulcet tones of the fiddler's bow. So overcome was he by the music that he began to dance, enveloped in the beautiful song."

"The townspeople, drawn by the strangeness of seeing a man dancing alone in the square gathered at last to see what was the matter."

"'Finally,' the fiddler thought to himself, 'the people have heard my song. Surely, they'll all begin to dance, just as the man they've come to see.'"

"But no one did. Little did the fiddler know, the townspeople heard not a single note of his beautiful song, and so had no idea why the man was dancing."

"'Look at him,' they shouted, 'he's dancing without music! What a fool he looks! He must be crazy.'"

"Then, they laughed him to scorn, pointing and jeering at what they saw as the fumbling antics of a senile buffoon. They could neither see nor hear the joyful ecstasy of a man enthralled by the music of a master."

"And so it is," concluded Rav Ezra, "that, though there are many who cannot hear the music and may think us mad, we must continue dancing to the music of the Master."

The topic that day was one of the most complicated and unwieldy in Jewish philosophy: the agency of man. It was, he said, the issue at the very heart of nearly every theological debate in Judaism for thousands of years of recorded history: if God, being omniscient, knew the future, then how could it be that man had free will, seeing as all his future actions and choices were already known? While the questions were new to none, it seemed that few, if any, at the table had ever confronted them directly.

When faced with hard doctrines such as this, most either put them off, or were put off by them. But we were shown a third path—a path wherein we were to face the issue head on, grappling with it until, familiar with its mysteries, we could live by what we learned.

He began to describe in intricate detail the principles that governed free will in the Jewish tradition, citing not the linguistics and legality of Rav Eliyahu, but a delicate balance of philosophy and mysticism, inviting us to approach and understand this most delicate of issues from the rational and suprarational in the same moment, seeing them not as separate approaches, but as integral parts of a single, comprehensive whole.

After nearly an hour of discussion, we still hadn't come any closer to seeing through the eyes of our teacher. Lifting his black fedora to scratch his head, Rav Eleizer puzzled over how he might help us, however difficult the topic might be.

As we waited, I thought of the story from the beginning of our lesson. Compared with the difficult nuances of the past hour, the story's lesson had been clear and simple, easily taken to whatever depths the listener was ready to plunge into.

That its message had been so powerfully etched upon my memory came as no surprise. *Chassidic* teaching believed storytelling to be "a holy activity equal to Torah study or prayer."[1]

The story was told of a famous rabbi who, passing by night through an unfamiliar town, saw

[1] see Yitzkhak Buxbaum, "Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism," *Hasidicstories.com,* http://www.hasidic stories.com/Articles/ Hasidic_Theories/spirit.html

a dazzling, otherworldly light pouring from the windows of its local synagogue. "Certainly," he thought, "there must be great scholars within, teaching and learning Torah in holiness to the Lord."

Entering the synagogue, he found only two ordinary men seated at a table, telling stories of the righteous to no one but themselves.

Deeply moved, the visitor at last understood: just as divine illumination came from teaching and learning, the same celestial light lay hidden in storytelling, too, waiting for a chance to enlighten the understanding and quicken the soul.

Perhaps Rav Ezra had the same thought, for after pondering a moment longer, he spoke—not to give us another explanation, but to teach us by the heavenly light of a story.

"At the heart of our question," he began, "is God's omniscience. If this discussion is to mean anything, we must first recognize the fundamental difference between the way we see the world, and the way God sees it. 'For as the heavens are higher than the earth,' said Isaiah, 'so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.'"[1]

Then his story began.

Long ago, a rabbi and his disciple came upon a small cottage. Turning aside, they knocked on the door, only to be greeted by a beautiful little family whose brightness and warmth belied their desperate circumstances. Once inside, the family gave freely of what little they could from the vacant nooks of their threadbare kitchen.

Before long, the two visitors left to continue their journey. Making their way down the scraggly old path that wound from the family's meager front door, the rabbi suddenly stopped. Just beside him stood a single, sickly cow—the family's only source of income—staring fixedly at the strangers, the silence only broken by the quiet sound of its ceaseless chewing.

And the old rabbi stared right back.

Waiting patiently, the disciple half-expected his teacher to leave the family his blessing. But to his horror, he heard the old rabbi mutter not a blessing, but a curse—not on the family, but on the cow, from which the Rav had never once removed his gaze.

Then, turning his back on cottage, cow and all, the rabbi walked boldly onto the road with his disciple in tow, still reeling in confusion.

They soon came upon a house altogether unlike the one they had left behind. More a mansion than a house, from its immaculate gardens to the beautiful furnishings only just visible through its opulent windows, it told a tale of unrivaled wealth and prosperity.

But instead of a warm and open welcome, they were greeted at the door by the scowling face of a man whose only intention was to be certain they left it and him alone, never to return.

[1] see Isaiah 55:9

Left with neither food nor rest as the day waned into late afternoon, they walked away, down the steps that led to the porch and past the pristine gardens. Suddenly, a great tree which had cast its shade across the whole estate suddenly fell, crashing on the path behind them.

Surely, the disciple thought with relish, he had missed the hastily-muttered curse the rabbi had used to fell the tree—the righteous curse of a poor old man spurned by another's foolish pride.

But, just as before, the disciple watched, dumbstruck, as his rabbi turned to the tree behind them and, glowering at the fallen trunk, winked, whereupon the tree, as if brought to life, stood upright, just as it had been before its fall.

The disciple could not believe his eyes. "Why?" he thought to himself. Didn't his master remember that this tree belonged to a man who, only moments before, had slammed a door in his face without so much as a second thought?

How could he have done so great a thing for one so undeserving?

Almost unbidden, a picture of that destitute family who had given them so much suddenly returned to his mind. If wealth were measured in kindness, he thought, surely this man would be among the poorest of the poor, and that family possessed of wealth beyond measure.

Reality, however, had been far less kind. The family, in spite of their kindness, now found themselves in possession of a cursed cow, courtesy of a guest, while this man, who had scowled and slammed his way out of kindness, had been the unknowing recipient of a miracle, even if for something so simple as a tree.

He simply didn't understand.

All these thoughts rushed through his mind as he followed the great Rav who, without a backward glance, shuffled down the road to the journey that lay ahead.

Just before dark, they arrived not at a home, but at the edge of a small village where a crowd had gathered for prayer in the synagogue.

After the end of the meeting, as the townspeople filed outside, the travelers had high hopes. Surely, at least one of these people would invite a travelling rabbi to dinner.

But in this they were again disappointed. Before too long, despite shoving and shouting, the people made their way out the door and down the lane, each disappearing as they dispersed to the home and hearth that awaited them.

And there they stood, just outside the synagogue doors, alone. Not one of the congregation, no, not even the town rabbi himself, had asked them who they were, why they were there, or where they were going.

But as they stood there, side by side in an evening that grew colder by the minute, there was a change. Where before the disciple might have expected some statement from his master, some evidence that what had happened penetrated his heart, now the disciple stood unsurprised by the silence that engulfed them, in which neither curse nor comment escaped

his rabbi’s lips.

After a moment, the rabbi lifted his eyes, extended his hands to the town, and said, “I bless you all to be *roshei kehilah* (ראשי קהילה)—heads of the community.”

At last, the disciple had had enough. For the second time that day, his master had returned blessing for a curse, all after spurning the only people who’d shown them any kindness at all on their journey.

All the patience and deference he had shown his master melted away in an instant.

“Why?” he asked, perhaps a little louder than he should have. “Why, rabbi, would you bless these people who shunned us from their hearts and homes? Why did you heal the tree of that rich man who laughed us to scorn as we stood on his doorstep? And, most of all, why would you curse that poor family’s cow after they showed us such kindness? All the rest I could, perhaps, understand as mercy, but what you did to our hosts...how could you? Please, I have followed you all my life. I only want to understand.”

Letting his aged head fall, the Rav sighed, disappointed to hear such a question. Then, lifting his careworn face to look searchingly into his disciple’s eyes, he replied in barely more than a whisper.

“I will tell you,” he said. “But because you doubted, you will no longer travel with me for a time.”

The disciple stood speechless, brokenhearted at losing his companion, but still eager to hear his questions answered.

“The people of this town,” began the rabbi, “treated us with disdain. Their unseemly conduct plainly spoke to the foolish pride by which they live their lives.”

The disciple stared, grateful to hear someone share in his bitter thoughts.

“Did you not see them,” he asked, “scrambling over one another to leave when the service had ended?”

“There could be no greater punishment in all the world for the people of this small village,” he went on, “than for each one to think that he, and no other, was the head of the community. In never giving deference to their fellow men,” he continued, “this village may be plagued by discord, strife and contention for many years to come.”

He paused and, seeing curiosity’s flame still flicker in the eyes of his companion, went on.

“At the house of the rich man who sent us away with neither a moment of his time nor a morsel of his bread, my wink did heal that tree. But what neither you nor anyone else could see was that, hidden under that tree lay a buried treasure that the rich man did not deserve and certainly would have put to evil use.”

“I restored the tree,” he said, “to prevent his ever finding it and thwart whatever wicked ends it would have served.”

“But rabbi,” said his companion, still impatient for an answer to his most pressing question, “what of the family? Surely they did not deserve a curse for their kindness.”

“Certainly not,” replied the master, “but before we ever arrived, there hung already upon that house a curse of death. It lay upon that poor family’s mother. And she surely would have died had I not exhausted nearly all my favor with Heaven to transfer that horrible curse to the least valuable living thing I could find at hand.”

“The cow?” asked the student, understanding dawning upon his face.

“The cow,” replied the Rav. “Hard times lay ahead for that poor little family,” he said, “but perhaps it is worth it when you consider that, at the very least, they will still have their mother.”

After a long pause, Rav Ezra spoke. “We see God through a window,” he said. “The darker the window, the more we only ever see ourselves. But as the window becomes cleaner it also becomes clearer, and we begin to see ourselves less and less as we start to see Him all the more.”

With that, the class ended, and we were left to comprehend as best we could the meaning of a story whose Godly purpose was, the story itself had witnessed, beyond our understanding.

When nearly everyone had gone, I approached the Rav.

“Rabbi,” I said, “have you thought about my question?”

“Of course,” he said, smiling as he shoved a pile of disheveled papers into his bag. “It’s fascinating.”

“How about an interview sometime?” I asked, knowing it was my last day.

“Let’s do it right now,” he said. “I’ll get my things and meet you next door.”

I nodded, swept out of the room, and quickly reviewed my notes.

I had only just sat down when he burst through the door and began, with all his usual speed. “Are you familiar with the 48 ways of acquiring Torah?” he asked, his gaze fixed upon me.

“Sure,” I said, “they’re in the *pirkei avot* (פרקי אבות).”

“But you have to know how to break them up,” he continued. “Some are practical, others ethical, and some are even mystical.”

“So,” he asked, “why would you have to be ritually clean, for instance, before learning? What does cleanliness have to do with learning?”

“Is it a question of whether it makes a difference?” I asked.

“Yes!” he replied excitedly. “What difference does it make to how I understand something if

I'm pure or not? It obviously does, in scripture, I mean, but why? What does it have to do with learning?”

I was glad to find that he didn’t wait for an answer, for in that moment, I had none.

“I mean, let's just talk practically for a second. Let's say I get a book—I get up, I read it and learn from it. There are no ethical, moral or spiritual requirements for me to understand it, whether it's Descartes, mathematics, Heidegger, or anything else. So, why do I need those requirements when I'm studying Torah? What's different about studying Torah? What's different about me, about my mental processes?”

“That reminds me,” I said, “of the story of the teacher who, after holding his student under water until he was nearly out of breath, pulled him up and said, ‘When you want to learn as much as you wanted air just now, then you will be ready, and I will be your teacher.’”

“That's beautiful,” said Rav Ezra. “And that's what we've been talking about these last few weeks. You've got to have that sense of lack. When you don't have that sense of lack, you're not going to learn.”

“Before we go on,” he said, “can I ask you a question? With all the rabbis you've been talking with, have you always told them you're not Jewish?”

“Of course,” I replied.

“And they’ve been okay with that?” he asked.

“Absolutely,” I said.

“So, can I be honest with you?” he asked. “Some of this is private. It’s like family stuff.”

“I completely understand,” I replied, wanting to be sure he understood my sincerity. “I would never ask you to share anything you didn’t feel you could,” I continued.

“Thank you,” he said. “I’m teaching a course right now over at the university, and most of my students aren’t Jewish. Normally, I teach freely, but every once in a while, I just catch myself and say, no, that’s private.”

“Which is, in and of itself, a beautiful concept,” I said.

“There's just something about it,” he mused, reflecting aloud on how uniquely he treated his own knowledge. “I can't explain it. You know the sources. It’s part of my covenant with God.”

Reflecting thoughtfully for a moment, he asked, “So, what have your studies led you to conclude thus far? How are you putting it all together?”

What a question, I thought. Despite all my months of fieldwork, data analysis and reading, I wasn’t sure I was ready to answer such a direct question about something that it had taken me years to approach, let alone understand.

“When I first came to Jerusalem,” I began, “I felt like my whole pedagogic world had been turned upside down. It was like I had been working on a puzzle, and someone had just pulled the tablecloth out from under it, sending all the pieces flying.”

“Teaching and learning in these *yeshivas*,” I went on, “from the straight-laced focus of the Lithuanian tradition to the *Farbrengens* of the Chabadniks—it’s all been entirely different from any learning environment I’ve been in before.”

“It seems like Western pedagogy seeks to first, make things easy, second, make them simple, and third, arrive at resolved conclusions at a lesson’s end. Now, I wouldn’t want to make any sweeping generalizations, but from what I’ve experienced where I’ve studied, those three things don’t characterize Jewish pedagogy at all.”

“Where I’ve studied,” I said, “difficulty and complexity were embraced, and lessons came and went without ever arriving at a conclusive resolution of the questions posed at their outset.”

Having witnessed firsthand my passion for the subject at hand, he began recommending books for me to read, as would any university professor. After I had written down an almost overwhelming list of literature at his behest, he paused again and, waiting for me to lift my eyes from the paper I had been writing on, looked directly at me and asked,

“So, what else do you want to talk about?”

“What about holiness?” I asked, eager to bring up the topic that had given me the most trouble.

“That’s a vast thing,” he said. “It depends on what direction you want to go. First of all, I need to ask, what does it mean to you?”

In reply, I began to explain the literature on the subject, starting with anthropology, then moving through sociology, philosophy and even theology. But what I had intended to be only a brief response grew quickly into a lengthy confession of my frustrations at never having found a satisfactory definition for the term.”

He listened patiently, as was his way, asking a clarifying question here and there, listening intently to whatever response I gave.

“You know,” I finally said, “I met with a friend of yours the other day, Moshe.”

“That’s wonderful!” he said. “What did he tell you?”

“He told me that holiness could only be discerned experientially,” I said, “and *that that* was the reason I had had such a hard time defining the concept. It was a beautiful idea, but, as one trying to write about holiness, incredibly frustrating, as well.”

Then, he asked a question, for which I had no answer.

“Since you’ve been here,” he asked, “how many holy people have you seen?”

"To be honest," I said in reply, "I'm not exactly sure what that means. All this literature has me more confused about holiness than ever. That is one of the reasons why I asked to speak with you."

"Everybody knows what that means!" he shouted, cutting across me. "Everybody knows where the holy people are in this city."

"Where are they?" I asked.

"Do you want names?" he asked, smiling. "Should I give you names?"

I was at a loss.

"How do you...?" I tried to ask. "How is that...?"

"Because I live in Jerusalem!" he shouted again, "Everyone knows who the holy people are. They're everywhere."

"How many?" I asked, my curiosity getting the better of me.

"In the Holy City?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "I mean, are we talking hundreds of people, or...?"

"In Jerusalem?!" he shouted, almost jumping out of his seat in exasperation. "What are you talking about?! This is Jerusalem. *Je-ru-sa-lem*. It's the holiest city in the world! Where do you expect to see holy people? If you're not going to see them in Jerusalem, you're not going to see them anywhere!"

He stopped to catch his breath for a moment. "Let me ask you something," he said. His words came more quietly then, but their whispered tone had lost none of the intensity and passion with which he had shouted moments before.

"If you went to Nepal, say, and you asked somebody, 'Excuse me, who are the holy people in this city?' wouldn't they be able to tell you who they are?"

"But if holiness is in all things, then isn't everyone a holy person, at least to some degree?" I asked.

"That's true," he admitted. "But it resides in some people more than in others—far more."

Pausing a moment to consider, he replied. "Rav Nachman taught that when you look at a holy person, you become ashamed of yourself. It's like a mirror. And that's true. That's one hundred percent true."

His voice trailed off for a moment as he shook his lowered head.

"I'll tell you, Isaac," he said, "there are people that I've seen that I would crawl under the table if I had to see them again. It's very scary, because you really see how far you are from..."

Then, with remarkable transparency and trust, he began listing the names of holy men in the city. With the names he mentioned, he described the revelatory, soul-baring experiences they had shared. Describing the intensity of those encounters, he returned again and again to the same idea: these experiences weren't for the faint of heart—they were frightening.

As he listed these holy men, he stared through the synagogue's only window, pondering deeply. Then, suddenly, he turned and looked straight at me. "It's not abstract," he said. "It's not abstract. They're holy people. You see it on them. Everybody sees it."

"What is it like?" I asked.

"No," he said, "no, you can't describe it. I would tell you to plug a transformer into a wall, then put your hand on top of it to feel those subtle vibrations right through your skin. It's a subtle vibration, but that's what you see when you see them. That's the best I can do."

"It's scary to go to them," he went on, "because it obliges you. You can't live the same life after you see a holy person. It changes you."

"So," I ventured, "does anything else bring about that same experience with holiness? Like, a holy place, or a holy act, for instance?"

"It's not the same," he declared with finality. "I've never encountered it."

"So," I ventured again, "it sounds like the best way to encounter holiness is in a holy person. Is that right?"

"Obviously," said the Rav, with even more finality than before. "I mean, there are peak experiences," he continued, "sacred times and such—it's not like we're bereft. Everybody has their moments when they feel connected, but it's not quite the same."

"I don't know," he said, struggling to describe something almost inherently inexplicable. "I can't put it into words. It's an awe, a manifestation, the Presence of God. It's seeing something not from this world, but in this world. It's something different."

"It's something that cuts horizontally, no, diagonally, through reality," he explained. "You see what I'm trying to say? Reality is so square, and sometimes, *sometimes,* something just cuts diagonally, right through it, and you see something that's just not part of it, you know?"

"But how do you get there?" I wondered aloud.

"To find someone like that?" he asked.

"Well, either find someone or be someone like that yourself," I said.

He furrowed his brow. "Rav Zilber said that a holy man puts all he has into everything he does. In other words, when he does something, he only does that thing. Everything he has goes into that moment, so he doesn't hold anything back. He's not split. He's not thinking about this and thinking about that, you know? That's what I see. There's something absolutely unwavering, unyielding in their commitment to the practice—*to the practice!* It's

not theoretical, but there's something...”

Here, he pounded his knuckles against the table in front of him several times, pursing his lips, frustrated that he couldn’t put it into words.

Suddenly, he looked up.

“Listen,” he said, “There are a lot of holy people here. If I were you, I would pray to God that you meet one before you leave—the one that you need to meet. Now, you might not see anything, but I would say that if you muster a really sincere prayer that you want to meet a holy person, not for your project, but for yourself, hopefully, God will answer. You only need to see *one*, then you'll know what holiness means.”

Sensing that we had somehow stepped onto holier ground, I asked, “Is there any of this I shouldn’t write down?”

“You know,” he said, stroking his beard, “many of the greatest teachers never wrote anything at all.”

“It seems like there’s a kind of knowledge,” I said, “that simply can’t be written, even if you tried.”

“And that’s the whole point,” he replied. “That's why it doesn't matter if you write this stuff down. You’re free to share them. There’s no end to the words that have already been shared about all this.”

Then, turning to fix my gaze in his, he spoke more deliberately than ever.

“But when you get to the point where you can't share it, when *you* can't share it, that is a very deep place. If you ever get to something and say, ‘I'm not going to write this down. This was a gift that God gave me—the thesis will survive without it,’ that is a precious thing. Whether you're Jewish or not, that becomes part of your covenant with God. He *told* you something.”

“*That* is the point of Torah,” he said, growing more animated by the moment, “It's not about reviewing the past, but engaging in the present. It has to do with right now, with the experience of God *right now, in this text*, and can only come about in a certain setting, with a certain respectfulness and with a certain approach.”

“Words?” he said. “Words don't matter. Words are dead. But Torah isn’t about words. Torah is about experience.”

“That's why it doesn't matter if you write all this down or not,” he said. “Even if you read a hundred of our holy books, *that's not what the covenant is*.”

“I once heard the Dalai Lama say that, when he was young he had to memorize vast amounts of scripture, all without understanding a single word. But once he had been enlightened, he understood everything in full.”

“One can't do away with all this stuff,” he said, pointing to the piles of books all around us, “but that's not the point. The point is how it sits in the person. The point is how it becomes

part of your relationship with God. The text means something more than what's written."

"Now," he said, "could this be translated into secular material? It could be," he considered, "it could be."

"When I teach in a university setting," he continued, "I quote freely from academics and other religions, because for me it's all part of serving God. That's where God put me. It's the *chullant*[1] in my pot."

"I wanted to test this out once," he said, "to see if I really could learn about a secular topic in a sacred way. So, I picked a question: 'Why do planes fly?' After a little research, I saw it. Planes fly because human beings changed the way they saw reality. *That* is what teaching is all about—putting the paradoxes of life on the table and working in them. *That* is where God manifests himself."

"The truth is," he said, "if you asked a Muslim these same questions, he would give you many of the same answers I am."

"When I teach," he said, "I bring everything in. It's all holy—as holy as you make it. *Col hamekhubad l'kodesh kodesh* (כל המכובד לקודש קודש)—all that honors the holy is holy itself."

"What was your thesis topic again?" he asked.

"Holiness and education," I said.

"I don't think anybody talks about that," he admitted. "Have you had anyone talk about that? About holiness?"

"Do you know Rav Eliyahu, by chance?" I asked.

"The genius?" he said.

"That's the one," I said. "I asked him for an interview about that very thing, but he said he couldn't help me."

"He's right," said the Rav. "No one talks about it."

"Well, what about you?" I asked. "What do you think is the relationship between them?"

"Between what?" he asked.

"Teaching and holiness," I said.

His eyes bulged.

"We said that already! *It's the same thing*. That's the point! They're not two different things. They're the *same."*

---

[1] "*Chullant*" is a traditional Ashkenazi dish commonly eaten during Sabbath meals.

I let that sink in.

“Again,” he continued, “it's not the effort. It's the person of the teacher who does it, because holiness does not exist outside of the person.”

“So,” I replied, “not only is a person the best manifestation of holiness, but its only one, too?”

“Exactly,” he said.

“Even if you read a holy book,” he explained, “there may be something holy within, and that something may even speak to you. But it’s not the book that’s speaking to you, but the author whose holiness you’re experiencing. If it’s the Talmud, it’s the Sages. If it’s Torah, it’s God. It’s not isolated. It always comes from someone.”

Just then, the synagogue door opened and people began filing in for their evening prayers.

We quickly gathered our things, walked out the door, and soon came into the neighborhood courtyard, walking a short way together. Suddenly, our paths parted, and with a wave of his hand, he was gone.

I stood for a moment, rooted to the spot, listening to the sound of his hurried footfall fade into the distance. The late afternoon sun had begun to set, and its golden rays reflected off the stones.

I thought then, as I’ve often thought since, of Rav Ezra’s invitation that I pray to meet a holy man before I left.

Suddenly, I turned to face the path he had taken. “Maybe I didn’t need to pray to meet a holy man, after all,” I thought as I watched his solitary figure fade into the distance. “Perhaps I already had.”

## *Osher Shlomo*: The *Yeshiva*

Tucked into the quiet neighborhood of *Nachlaot, Osher Shlomo* was both the smallest and youngest of the *yeshivas* I encountered. Founded no more than a decade ago, its rabbinic ordination program included only a handful of advanced students, ranging from day to day between five and fifteen people in attendance. In this environment, the demarcation between teacher and student was much less formal, and so my own reception into the community was much more inviting. This handful of men, many of whom had young families of their own, met before dawn to pray, then continued studying together until well into the evening, switching between hour-long lessons and paired Talmudic study late into the night.

Like *Merkaz David, Osher Shlomo* approached the teaching and learning of Torah from a *Chassidic* perspective, though from a different branch of *Chassidism.* Rather than favor the teachings of *Chabad* and the Lubavitcher Rebbe, they adhered more closely to the *Breslev* tradition, embracing the broader devotional approach to Torah taught by *Chassidism’s* founder, the *Ba’al Shem Tov* (בעל שם טוב).[1] Those who taught at *Osher Shlomo* approached the study of Torah not out of a sense of duty to God, but “a means to the goal of *devekut*—the mystical clinging to the Divine.” In this way, explained Rav Ezra, “selfless

[1] Lamm, *The Religious Thought of Hasidism,* xlii

learning, *limmud Torah l'shemah*—for the sake of Heaven—became learning *l'shem hey*—for the sake of...the Divine Presence of God."[1] Furthermore, as part of the *Breslev* movement, teaching at *Osher Shlomo* tended to be modeled after that of *Breslev's* founder, *Rebbe Nachman,* whose teaching style emphasized mysticism, prayer, singing and, most of all, storytelling as powerful tools in the sanctification of Torah study.

## Themes

This chapter's first themes illustrate the human dimensions of sanctity in education. "Holiness as Extra-Propositional Experience" describes one perspective of how Judaic sanctity, especially in an educational context, can only be known through lived experience. "Personified Sanctity" builds upon this theme, highlighting how sanctity is only manifest in the world when embodied in a person. Considering these themes together, "*Chinuch* (חינוך): Awakening the Dormant Inherent" describes how the holiness of teaching and learning is awakened from dormancy through volitional human participation.

The next theme, "Holiness as Teaching and Learning," describes holiness as a pedagogic encounter between God and man. "Teaching, Learning and Reciprocal Sanctity" illustrates how teaching and learning, when realized together, have the capacity to sanctify one another. Neither teaching nor learning alone is considered capable of realizing the degree of sanctity made possible by such reciprocal sanctification. Most important of all, "Divine Pedagogic Influence" highlights God's central role in the sanctification of teaching and learning, actively taking part in them as an involved, agentive participant. All these themes illustrate the sanctity of teaching and learning as an embodied act of communion between God and man, each actively contributing to its sanctification.

### *Holiness as Extra-Propositional Experience*

*But when you get to the point where you can't share it, when you can't share it, that is a very deep place. If you ever get to something and say, 'I'm not going to write this down. This was a gift that God gave me—the thesis will survive without it,' that is a precious thing. Whether you're Jewish or not, that becomes part of your covenant with God. He told you something.*

That Judaic holiness is paradoxical, and so difficult to approach propositionally, is an idea that appeared again and again at *Osher Shlomo.* Whether in the storytelling musings of Rav Simcha or the intellectual rigor of Rav Eliyahu, holiness was often described as both unapproachably transcendent and, at the same moment, entirely understandable in the everydayness of human interaction. For holiness to be holiness, taught Rav Gadi, "it needed an extra something that is not conscious." Of one's capacity to be holy, he explained, "Other people can say that I am holy, but the moment I become self-aware of it, then I know that I'm the furthest thing from holiness possible." In this sense, the very existence of holiness, especially in a person, depends not on its explicit exposition, but instead by quietly living it—realizing it experientially, while resisting the tendency to identify it propositionally.

Moses' encounter with the bush that "burned and was not consumed," for instance, illustrates this experiential dimension of sanctity, as it was something Moses "turned aside to see" without any attempt to explicitly explain or define it.[2] The only rabbi I encountered at *Osher Shlomo* willing to define holiness was Rav Gadi, who said (quite paradoxically), "Holiness is exactly what cannot be defined." He continued, "It's always separate, but

---

[1] Rav Eliezer Shore, "Torah from the Heart: Chassidic Insights into Spiritual Education," *EliezerShore.com,* http://www.eliezershore.com/uploads/1/8/7/5/1875295/torah_from_the_heart.pdf, 202.
[2] see Exodus 3:1-5

entirely present." Sanctity's aversion to the explicitly propositional, said the Rav, extended not only to holy people and places, but to actions, as well. "If you point to a thing and say that it's God and you bow down to it," he said, "that's idol worship. The moment you say that about an action, it's like you've created an idol." This made talking about teaching and learning as a holy act difficult for, as an action, its explicit definition as holy, for Rav Gadi, at least, immediately nullified its sanctity. In this way, for those at *Osher Shlomo,* the sanctity of teaching and learning was experientially knowable, but propositionally elusive.

Furthermore, sanctity and education are linked by a shared paradoxicality. "There were once two lifelong friends," explained Dov, "who, though they lived in different towns, were very close and always wrote back and forth about what they were studying. After years of writing every day, the servant who carried the letters back and forth gave in to his curiosity and opened one of them. But instead of the sagely secrets he had hoped to find, it was completely blank. Troubled at the thought that he had been passing blank pieces of paper for so long, he confessed what he had done to the rabbi, who replied, 'Sometimes I write and sometimes I don't. Sometimes the heart is so full that our knowledge and learning go beyond words. When that happens," he explained, "we send each other blank pieces of paper to express what neither written nor spoken word can.' This is *aselut*," Dov said, "the realm of paradox where silence and speech co-exist at the same moment." From Dov's perspective, this was a core feature of education's sanctity.

"The holiness of this kind of learning," Dov continued, "is partly about going deeper into the unknown. The more you know," he said, "the more you know that you don't know, in a certain way." Yet, this "not knowing" dimension of education's sanctity was, Dov explained, "a more sophisticated way of 'not knowing' than simply being ignorant." It was, instead, a deep awareness of the inexorably experiential nature of teaching and learning itself, whose object was not the conclusive acquisition of knowledge, but participation in the process of pursuing something whose purpose lay in the pursuit itself. Such personal, experiential knowledge dovetails with Russell's notion of *knowledge by acquaintance* as opposed to *knowledge by description*,[1] as well as Polanyi's concept of *personal knowledge*.[2] Even Aristotle spoke of knowledge in this way: "For the things we have to learn before we can do them," he explained, "we learn by doing them."[3] This notion of the inherent experientiality of knowing is also reflective of the Judaic idea of knowing God. "We can't know the Creator directly," explained Dov, "but we can know more and more of His attributes. So, a good teacher is transmitting those attributes through how he teaches, through 'grasps' of what can be grasped." As a way of knowing God by experience rather than description alone, education is seen in this context as a sacred act.

Interpreted in light of Judaism's code of conduct, or *halakha* (הלכה), explained Dov, which meant "path" or "walking," knowledge was seen as a lived process of "walking in God's ways" or "coming to know how God does things." This hearkens back to *imitatio dei* and the importance of process over outcome. In no other way, said Dov, could one come to experience holiness than through this lived process. "You definitely get a sense of the unknowable," he explained, "when you're going into these ultra-complex arguments and you're trying to grasp the ungraspable through a medium you actually can grasp. Because the oral tradition is so complex," he said, "it truly is like experiencing the ungraspable." This represents the *telos* of Torah study: not to answer an unanswerable question, but to experience the propositionally inexpressible (i.e., sanctity) through the meaningful act of teaching and learning.

---

[1] see Bertrand Russell, *Mysticism and Logic* (London: Taylor Garnett Evans & Co. Ltd., 1954), 410.
[2] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*.
[3] see David Ross, *Nicomachean Ethics: Aristotle Book 2*, trans. David Ross, ed. Lesley Brown (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908).

“It is impossible,” said Eliade, “to overemphasize the paradox represented by every hierophany, even the most elementary.” Like a stone that becomes sacred to one, but remains ordinary to another, he explained, sanctity is something that defies propositionality, but thrives on the experiential plane—something, said Eliade, that “man becomes aware of” by experience, rather than by detached study alone.[1] In the beginning pages of *The Idea of the Holy,* Otto warns readers that, if they cannot recall a “deeply-felt religious experience,” they should “read no farther.”[2] So crucial was this experiential element of knowledge to Otto’s understanding of sanctity that he defined his own term “numinous” as the “*numen praesens*,” or a phenomenon that must be experienced in order to be known.[3]

Otto also touched upon the sanctity of teaching, saying that this “perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible” experience, “while it admits of being discussed, cannot be strictly defined.” Beyond propositional categorization, in order to teach another the sacred, he says, one “must be guided and led on by consideration and discussion of the matter through the ways of his own mind, until he reach the point at which ‘the numinous’ in him perforce begins to stir, to start into life and into consciousness.”[4] This “awakening of the numinous within” hearkens back to the sparks of Divinity by which God created man in the Genesis account. Sanctity, from this perspective, not only lies dormant within, waiting for the agentive moment of its realization, but “cannot, strictly [or, propositionally] speaking, be taught. It can only be evoked, awakened,” aided by one familiar with the process by which the inner sparks of Divinity are awakened—aided, in other words, by a teacher.

When I asked Rav Ezra whether I could share what I had learned from him, he replied that they were “just words” and that I was “free to share them.” However, when I came across something different, something that I experienced in the process of teaching and learning that, as Eliade said of the *hierophany,* manifested itself to me, I would reach what Rav Ezra called, “a very deep place.” “If you ever get to the point where you can’t share it,” he explained, “when *you* can’t share it*,* and you get to something and say, ‘I’m not going to write this down. This was a gift that God gave me and the dissertation will survive without it,’ then that’s a very precious thing. You see,” he went on, “that is the point of Torah. It’s not the passing on of something in the past. *It’s the engagement in the experience of the present*. It doesn’t have to do with what was told over. It has to do with *right now*—with the experience of God right now. It’s not just words,” he explained. “Torah is not about words. Torah is about experience.” This was where teaching and learning met sanctity—that, he explained, became my living covenant relationship with God, not in some remote past, handed down through the generations, but given with the same potency and sanctity with which it was revealed in antiquity. As a thing of the present, then, a thing of experience—in this context, teaching and learning were considered sacred.

## *Personified Sanctity*

*“That spot, the very same in which Rav Eliyahu was now sitting, was sacred. But it had not been made so by some miraculous theophany or elaborate ceremony. It was sacred because of the teaching and learning that had occurred there, realized by the painstaking efforts of a man whose consecrated scholarship had made him holy.”*

Above the spot where each of *Osher Shlomo’s* rabbis sat, there hung a single plaque whose opening words read, “*b’makom kadosh zeh* (במקום קדוש זה)—in this holy place.” There

---

[1] see Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane, 8, 12.
[2] Otto, *The Idea of the Holy,* 8.
[3] ibid., 11.
[4] ibid.

had studied a *talmid khakham* (תלמיד חכם)—a great student of the Teaching. By virtue of that diligent, daily study, this *talmid khakham* (תלמיד חכם) had been so sanctified as to make the very place where he sat holy, as well. While there may have been some manifestation of holiness on the earth during the time of the Temples in Jerusalem, Rav Ezra explained, both at that time and in the present, holiness found a home in people more than anything else. Unlike mankind, objects, places and structures could not themselves participate in the flux of temporal human experience, which were the very building blocks of sanctity.[1] As for the written word, it was, as Rav Ezra said, "nothing" when removed from the experientiality so essential to its holiness. Mankind, on the other hand, lived on a temporal, experiential plane—one in which teaching and learning were among the most powerful ways not only to experience sanctity, but to come to embody it, as well.

Though Jerusalem itself was riddled with Jewish holy places to which the pious made pilgrimage, many of these were not chosen for the events that had happened there, but for the holy people who once dwelt there.[2] In such "theistic circumstances," wrote Smart, the numinous resided not in holy places, but in holy persons, who acquired "a numinous exterior."[3] More powerful than the posthumous, residual sanctity of deceased holy persons, however, was being in the physical presence of a living holy person—so powerful that Rav Ezra described it as "frightening." But evoking the "fear and trembling" of Sinai was not the purpose of such embodied sanctity. It was, instead, to "enlighten and arouse one's heart by virtue of the holiness concentrated in them."[4] One of the primary ways in which such powerful sanctity resided in and manifested itself through holy persons was their ceaseless participation in both teaching and learning.

"Holiness," explained Shapiro, is embodied by "those who have achieved the closest relationship with God...whose lives are dedicated exclusively to His service and the fulfillment of His will."[5] This dedication to understand, live and embody His Teaching comes about most completely, said Lamm, in the process of Torah study itself.[6] By such living study of God's Teaching, the Jewish people are to be "holy unto the Lord."[7] As a nation of priests,[8] they are not only to be His unique possession,[9] but become like Him, as well.[10] "The more profound one's subservience is to the Infinite God," said Shapiro, "the more intense one's quality of holiness is said to be."[11] In this sense, not only was Aaron, Ancient Israel's first High Priest, a holy man, but, like the holy of holies, he was "most holy."[12]

However holy the High Priest may have been, through the sanctification of teaching and learning, says the Talmud, even a Gentile could become "like a high priest"—not in the capacity to perform the ordinances associated with that office, but in sharing the same degree of sanctity embodied in those who held it.[13] All things being equal, say the Sages, the high priest is held in higher esteem than a fatherless commoner. If, however, that same fatherless commoner is a disciple of the wise and the High Priest unlearned, explains the Talmud, he

---

[1] Heschel, *The Sabbath*, 16.
[2] see Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, 183-184.
[3] ibid., 183.
[4] Lamm, *Religious Thought of Hasidism*, 274.
[5] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 58.
[6] see Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake*, 190-204.
[7] see Jeremiah 2:3
[8] see Numbers 6:8, 8:14
[9] see *Pirkei Avot* 6:10
[10] see Shapiro, *The Doctrine of the Image of God and Imitatio Dei*.
[11] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 58.
[12] see 1 Chronicles 23:13
[13] *B. Sanh* 59a.

becomes greater even than the High Priest.[1] Teaching and learning, then, can elevate the lowliest of men to a greater level of holiness than even the High Priest, the holiest man on earth.[2]

To embody holiness itself, the Talmud says, one must "be like a deep pit, which holds its water," or, "like a cylinder lined with pitch, which preserves the wine in it," or even, "like a sponge, which absorbs everything."[3] In the Jewish tradition, mankind is to strive to be vessels with the capacity to receive and retain the Teaching of Heaven, and with it, the sanctity of Heaven, as well. Comparing the human soul's capacity to a sponge's ability to soak up water, the Sages intimate that the sanctity of Torah is not just to be practiced, but soaked up, as it were, embodied by teachers and learners. The human soul is considered in this way uniquely equipped to absorb and embody the sanctity of teaching and learning. Once alive in the heart of man, the Talmud describes how the holiness of teaching and learning is "more substantial" than any physical possession imaginable.[4] In this sense, unlike elements of the physical world, the temporally-situated, experiential and process-oriented practice of teaching and learning can find a home only in a "vessel," so to speak, which is likewise experiential, process-oriented and temporally-situated: in short, a living soul.

Embodied in a living, holy person, this living, holy Teaching affects a change in that person's countenance. The Talmud tells of Rav Abbahu who, coming home from a long journey, returned with a brilliant light shining from his face. Students began to guess, "He has found a treasure!" But when asked, Rav Abbahu simply explained that he had only been studying Torah, something worth far more than any treasure.[5] For "a man's wisdom," he quoted from scripture, "maketh his face to shine."[6] "Though holiness—the divinity in something—by definition cannot be known," said Rav Gadi, it can been seen by others, in others. "I would say it about a person," he explained. "It can be seen in the way they conduct themselves." "Even as when first used, fire leaves a mark on a man's body," says the Talmud, "so words of Torah, when used, leave a mark on the body." And as those who work with fire are distinguishable from others, it continues, "so, too, by their walk, by their speech, by their garments, disciples of the wise are just as readily distinguishable."[7]

The holy fire of Torah not only leaves its mark on those who teach and learn, but when they do so, even "their words are like coals of fire."[8] Much like one's sanctity increases with one's proximity to God, being in the presence of holy persons allows one to absorb their sanctity.[9] Because of the efficacious sanctity of holy persons, scripture stipulates that they be accorded a heightened degree of respect and deference. The Holy City itself, Jerusalem, was said to have been destroyed because its holy men were ignored by its people.[10] For the illness that afflicts those who disrespect or disregard personified sanctity, says the Talmud, "there is no remedy."[11] One must not stand behind one who embodies the sanctity of Torah,[12] nor cough or spit in his presence.[13] Such irreverence toward holy people, said Rava, was more

[1] *B. Hor* 13a.; Numbers *Rabba* 6:1.
[2] see 1 Chronicles 23:13
[3] *Derekh Eretz,* 1:2. Cf. 1:20.
[4] *Tanhuma, Terumah,* §2; *Tanhuma* B., *Terumah*, §1.
[5] *P. Shab* 8:1, 11a; Ecclesiastes *Rabba* 8:1, §4; PR 14:10
[6] Ecclesiastes 8:1
[7] *Sif Deut.,* §343l *Yalkut, Berakhah,* §951
[8] *Pirkei Avot* 2:10.
[9] When R. Zera grew too weak to study, he used to go and sit by the door of R. Nathan be Tobi's house, saying to himself: When the Sages pass by, I will stand up and receive a reward [for it in the world to come].
[10] *B. Shab.* 119b.
[11] ibid.
[12] *B. Ber.* 27b.
[13] The disciples' manners bring Torah into disrepute. *B. Er* 99a, and *En Yaakov*, ad loc.

punishable than irreverence toward even a Torah scroll, itself one of Judaism's most sacred relics.[1] Rather than treat holy people with disrespect, explained the Talmud, it was one's duty to "be willing to be covered by the dust of their feet" so as to "drink in their words thirstily."[2]

Despite the propositional paradoxicality of holiness discussed earlier, sanctity's at-home-ness in the experiential realm makes it well-suited to embodiment and personification in holy people. The nature of embodiment, however, takes sanctity beyond the experiential and into the realm of becoming. "It is characteristic of Hebrew and other Semitic languages," said Boman, "that all these verbs designate first of all the 'becoming' of the conditions and qualities in question."[3] In this light, holiness in the Judaic context is not a static state of experiential being, but one of perpetually-involved, volitional becoming. So considered, holiness is not just experientially-perceived, but something one can become by experiential means. Those who come to embody such sanctity, say the *Chassidic* masters, do so by virtue of their teaching and learning,[4] themselves among the most important characteristics of personified holiness.[5]

According to Rav Ezra, not only was holiness best-suited to dwell within and manifest itself through a holy person, but "holiness," he said, "simply could not exist outside a person." Speaking of holy books, he explained, "When you take a book and open it up, there's something holy and it talks to you. But if you ever felt the holiness of a book," he continued, "it's not the book that's talking to you. It's the author. And if the book is scripture, that author is God." The sanctity of holy books, even those said to have been authored by God, lay not in the words themselves, but in their connection to the personified, embodied sanctity of their authors. Whether places, objects, or the written word, sanctity could always trace its roots back to a holy individual, whose living embodiment of holiness first brought it to life. In this sense, people, together with God, are the epicenter of Judaic sanctity, and so not only capable of becoming holy, says Shapiro, but, as a source of holiness, "most holy, *kodesh-kodashim* (קודש קודשים)."[6] In short, the command to be a holy people—not just to participate in holiness, but to embody holiness—could be realized specifically through the consecratory acts of teaching and learning.[7]

## *Chinuch (חינוך): Awakening the Dormant Inherent*

*As they placed their trust in Rav Yonatan's knowledge of their inherent, though dormant potential, they learned, reaching out to grasp a hand extended not in condescension, but with an understanding of who they really were, or could be, with just a little help.*

The Sages teach that the *shekinah* (שכינה), or the manifestation of God's holiness,[8] dwells at least to some degree in all things. Whether in nature, people or objects,[9] vestiges of this holiness "inhere in all ramifications of existence," in what Jewish tradition calls "Divine

---

[1] *B. Mak* 22b.
[2] *Pirkei Avot* 1:4.
[3] Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (London: Westminster Press, 1960), 31.
[4] see Lamm, *Religious Thought of Hasidism*, 252.
[5] Malkah Shapiro, *The Rebbe's Daughter: Memoir of a Hasidic Childhood* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002), xx.
[6] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism,* 60.
[7] see Exodus 22:30; Leviticus 19:2.
[8] see Alan Unterman, Rivka G. Horowit, Joseph Dan and Sharon Faye Koren, "Shekinah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 18. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 440-444. (The entry for *Shekinah* is also called the "numinous influence of God in the world."
[9] *Shab.* 67a; *Sot.* 5a; Exodus *Rabba* 34:1.

sparks."[1] Unlike the sanctity of God, however, which is both unconditional and perfect,[2] the sanctity of these sparks exists only in potentiality, awaiting some intervention whereby its latent potential for holiness might be realized. The primary means of that realization lies in volitional human action. While "true, complete, and fulfilled holiness emerges as the product of the interaction between God...and man," it is man alone who has the capacity and responsibility to "actualize the unrealized possibilities of holiness."[3] Though God is understood as its source, the idea that holiness is an inherent, though dormant characteristic of all things places the responsibility of consecration upon mankind. In other words, "It is up to man," said Shapiro, "to enable the hallowed phases of reality to achieve their holiness in full."[4]

Rav Simcha touched upon this idea in one of his early morning *Chassidus* classes when he explained why he used the word *shalom* (שלום) as a greeting. "When we say *shalom* (שלום) to someone," he explained, "we are recognizing the divinity within them. It is for this reason," he continued, "that we say *shalom* (שלום) when we see and greet them, as it is one of the names of God." When Yoni, one of his students, boldly asked, "Isn't the holiness already there?" Rav Simcha responded. "No. It is dormant, inherently dormant in this thing and must be awakened by certain, non-ordinary actions on our part." Seen in light of this example, even the sanctity inherent within the human soul is dormant, waiting to be kindled by human action. In keeping with the divinely-appointed pattern outlined earlier of giving invitations to which man must respond, God makes the realization of sanctity's potential contingent upon man's agentive involvement according to Divinely-sanctioned parameters.

While all things are endowed with these sparks, even in its potentiality, holiness is gradational. In other words, because "the Creator has set apart segments of His universe as specially and uniquely hallowed,"[5] some things are simply holier than others, or at least have the potential to be so. Among the most potent of these Divine sparks rests in the soul of man. So exceptional is the potentiality of this particular spark that Jewish tradition identifies it not simply as *a* Divine spark, but *the* Divine spark, the very essence of God that has dwelt in man from the moment of His creation.[6] Of the moment when God breathed the living soul, or *neshemat chaim* (נשמת חיים), into man, Philo wrote, "clearly what was then thus breathed was ethereal spirit, even an effulgence of the Blessed."[7]

Philo is not alone in this assertion. Rabbinic literature[8] refers frequently to the soul's inherent purity,[9] as well as the reality of its heavenly origins as a vessel wherein the Divine spark may dwell.[10] Man's soul was so imbued with God's light, says the Talmud, that man should consider himself a dwelling place for the Holy One and His holiness.[11] Elijah de

---

[1] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 46.

[2] see *Sifra, Kedoshim,* ad Leviticus 19:2: ''...for I...*am* holy' [Leviticus 19:2]—I am holy whether you sanctify Me or whether you do not sanctify Me.'"

[3] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism*, 68.

[4] ibid., 67.

[5] ibid., 46.

[6] ibid., 68.

[7] Philo, *On the Special Laws (De Specialibus Legibus) IV,* 24, trans. Coulson (London: W. Heinemann, 1937), 85; For Philo's views on the nature of the soul, see Harry Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Vol. 2* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1948), 589-95.

[8] see Ecclesiastes *Rabba* xii. 7: "The soul I have given thee is pure; if thou givest it back to Me in the same state, it is good for thee; if not, I will burn it before thee."; George Foot Moore, *Judaism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927), 448-9; Kaufmann Kohler, *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered* (New York: Macmillan, 1928), 212f.

[9] see *BT Shab.* 152b.

[10] see *Sifrei* Deuteronomy 506.

[11] *BT Ta'an* 11a-b.

Vidas even wrote that a literal spark, or *nitsuts* (ניצוץ), of God's fiery divinity and holiness dwelt within man.[1] The 11th century Jewish poet Gabirol described God's Divine spark within man as "a fire within." Hearkening back to the Biblical imagery of Moses' encounter with the burning bush,[2] he described the human soul:

> Thou didst fashion it from the flames of
> the Intelligence, and its spirit is as fire
> burning in it.
> Thou didst send it into the body to serve it and to
> guard it, and it is as a fire within, and yet
> it does not burn it.[3]

Seen in light of such imagery, the soul's dormant sanctity longs to be awakened, actively anticipating the moment of its realization by human action. So deep was this longing that one Midrashic parable personified it, comparing it to a princess who, after being raised in a royal household, married a poor commoner. Like the princess who might never be satisfied with even her poor husband's best efforts to treat her like a queen, the Divine spark in the human soul is never satisfied with the profane, but longs instead to encounter and commune with the holiness from whence it came.[4]

Rabbis both modern and medieval maintain that teaching and learning are among the most potent ways by which the soul's inner sanctity might be realized. Speaking of Philo's perspective, Jacobs wrote, "Every man, *in respect of his mind,* is allied to the divine Reason, having come into being as a copy, fragment or ray of that blessed nature."[5] Others (e.g., Ibn Da'ud, Maimonides, Gersonides, etc.) agreed, maintaining not only that this "ray of the blessed nature" was interwoven with the human capacity to reason, but that it was through study that the latent sanctity of the soul could become fully-realized holiness.[6] Even Jewish mystics describe teaching and learning as a means of awakening the soul's inherent sanctity. Quoting the Proverb, "Out of His mouth cometh *knowledge and discernment*,[7] together with the passage in Job, "It is a spirit in man and the breath of the Almighty that giveth them *understanding*,[8]" Nachmanides' perspective paints the Divine spark of man as being intimately linked with his capacity to learn and know—in other words, the educative process.[9] Jewish mysticism further links the human soul to the realm of *binah* (בינה), or Divine Understanding,[10] maintaining that, when God breathed the soul into the lump of clay that was man, He specifically gave him of His *wisdom*."[11] In light of such arguments, teaching and learning are seen as a fundamental means of sanctifying the human soul, and so bringing holiness into the world.

So, while Divine sparks in every facet of the universe may all possess at least some degree of sacred potentiality, the dormant, inherent potential within *the* Divine spark of the human soul is exceptional among them. Again, even this superlative sanctity exists only in

---

[1] Elijah de Vidas, *Keter Malkhut XXIX*, trans. Bernard Lewis (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1961), 49.
[2] see Exodus 3:2
[3] Elijah de Vidas, *Keter Malkhut,* 49.
[4] *Midrash Kohelet Rabbah* on Eccl. 6: 6
[5] Louis Jacobs, *Religion and the Individual: A Jewish Perspective* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 46.
[6] Isaac Husik, *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940), xlv-xlvii.
[7] see Proverbs 2:6
[8] see Job 52:8
[9] *Tanya*, Ch. 2, 11.
[10] Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism,* 241.
[11] *Ma'amar* I, fo. 2b.

embryo. “The holiness of all the congregation of the children of Israel is not a fact,” Harvey said, “but a command” whose realization is by no means a foregone conclusion.[1] Holiness is, in this sense, again, like a seed: the gift of what could grow from it might be inherent within it, but its becoming anything more than a seed depends entirely not on its origins, but on those who help it grow. So important is this process that scripture tells of a man named Korah who, rather than accept the yoke of Divine responsibility to realize Israel’s dormant sanctity, preached instead that ancient Israel needed no sanctification, and was holy inherently, without the need to be sanctified by the actualizing, agentive encounter between God and man. This idea was considered so dangerous, so opposed to the fundamental fabric of Judaic holiness, that it was rejected as an all-out rebellion against the sanctity of all the commandments.[2]

This process whereby the spark of Divinity within the soul is realized is embedded in the Hebrew word for education, *chinuch* (חינוך). The term comes from a root that “implies the initial entry of a person or an object into a trade or path that is his destiny. Thus we find,” continues Rashi, a medieval Talmudic commentator, “the root CH-N-CH referring to the education of a child [and] the consecration of the altar in the holy temple.”[3] Education, taught Rabbi Shapira of the Warsaw Ghetto, is entirely focused on the realization of one’s inherent, though dormant potential. “The word *chinuch*,” he said, “refers not to a trade or skill, but to the potential, the predilection and capability that a person might possess..., the realization of the already inherent capacity..., the actualization of a potential.” Because this potentiality would certainly remain hidden unless sought out and discovered, he said, “Our task is to cause the potential to emerge, to accomplish the *chinuch* that will transform the person.”[4] Teaching and learning, then, is not a matter of whether such potential could be found, but that of working to bring it out, knowing all along that it must already be there. “No matter how hidden it may be or how dead it may appear to the eye of the observer,” wrote Jacobs, “a small point of Jewish faith, *dos pintele Yid,* could always be rekindled.”[5]

Although the sanctity of this process comes from God, a teacher is indispensable to its realization. Speaking of this soul-spark, Rav Shapira said, “This quality or potential may be found in him only in very small measure, in total hiddenness; [yet] the task of the educator is to uncover it.”[6] Part of the indispensability of a teacher is his capacity to see the spark within another, having already uncovered and worked with his own throughout his learning life. As such, a teacher should have no doubts as to *if* his student has that spark, but instead only be focused on *how* to uncover it. “Since a [student] has the spirit of God, the breath of the Lord, hidden and concealed within him from the very moment of his birth,” Rav Shapira went on, “it is necessary to raise him and educate him to bring out and reveal this godliness and allow it to flourish.”[7]

This is the task of the educator, or *mechanech* (מחנך). By comparing the educative process to the change whereby a pile of unhewn stone[8] may become a holy place of sacrifice, Rashi highlighted the transcendent sanctity inherent in every learner, no matter how “unhewn” their intellect. Calling again on Gabirol’s poetical illustration of the soul-spark as holy fire like that which Moses encountered in the burning bush, Rabbi Shapira taught that anyone “who wishes to uncover the soul...to ignite it so it will burn with a heavenly fire...so

---

[1] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 19.
[2] ibid.
[3] see Rashi’s commentary on *Parshat Lech Lecha*
[4] Kalonymus Shapira, *The Student’s Obligation*, trans. M. Odenheimer (Northvale, New Jersey: Aronson, 1991), 4.
[5] Jacobs, *The Doctrine of the ‘Divine Spark’ in Man in Jewish Sources*, 46.
[6] Shapira, *The Student’s Obligation*, 4-5.
[7] ibid.
[8] see Deuteronomy 27:6 (the altar need only to have been made of unhewn stone)

that the student's entire being...will increase in holiness..., such an educator must adapt himself attentively to the student...until he reaches the hidden soul-spark. Then he can help it emerge, blossom and grow."[1] In this respect, personified holiness, or the realization of the human soul-spark's Divine potential, is contingent upon the act of teaching and learning.

"The whole point of Torah—the whole point of Teaching," said Rav Gadi, "is to make God a reality in this world." The dormant holiness inherent in all things awaits human action to be realized, so that holiness, or as Rav Simcha explained, a thing's "transparency to its Source," might increase, that God might be more present in this world. By teaching and learning, this sanctity may be brought about, not only in making those who learn aware of such sanctity in their surroundings, but more importantly that such holiness might be revealed within them, as well. For one whose soul-spark is brought forth to shine by teaching and learning, explains the Talmud, is like a flask of fine perfume: if left alone, it will never release its scent; but, when shaken, it realizes its potential, and fills the room with its sweet aroma.[2] "There is a divine light in every soul," explained Heschel. "It is dormant and eclipsed by the follies of this world. We must first awaken this light, then the upper light will come upon us." Through teaching and learning,[3] this light can be realized—not only invoked from Heaven, as the Psalm "In Thy light we shall see light," but as Rabbi Aaron of Karlin taught, "In Thy light which is within us will we see light."

## *Holiness as Teaching and Learning*

*"We said that already! It's the same thing. That's the point! They're not two different things. They're the same."*

Together with *imitatio dei*,[4] coming to know God is one of Judaism's central purposes.[5] However, Jewish scripture holds that knowing God is beyond the reach of human reason and intellect alone.[6] "When the intellect contemplates His essence," wrote Maimonides, "its apprehension turns to incapacity."[7] Even scriptural descriptions of God are often in human terms, such as His being "merciful,"[8] "gracious"[9] and "compassionate."[10] While such passages may bring certain aspects of God's nature within the realm of human understanding, by following an "anthropomorphic pattern,"[11] they ultimately fall short of illustrating the intellectually incomprehensible character of God to which Maimonides referred. As such, though these passages may elucidate specific Divine attributes to emulate as part of *imitatio dei*, they do relatively little to help in mankind's quest to know God. Under the conditions set forth by Jewish scripture, it seems, any such effort to know God under the tutelage of the human intellect alone appears doomed to failure. In commanding mankind to know Him, yet at the same time maintaining that He cannot be known intellectually, God extends an invitation that mankind come to know Him by some other, extra-intellectual means.

---

[1] Shapira, *The Student's Obligation,* 5.
[2] B. AZ 35b.
[3] Abraham Heschel, "God in Search of Man," in *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern* Perspectives, ed. Jacob Neusner (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973), 29.
[4] see Shapiro, *The Doctrine of the Image of God and Imitatio Dei*, 58.
[5] see David Shapiro, "Wisdom and Knowledge of God in Biblical and Talmudic Thought," *Tradition* 12, no. 2 (1971): 70-89.
[6] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 10.
[7] Maimonides*, The Guide for the Perplexed,* 1:58.
.[8] see Exodus 34:6
[9] see *Shabbat* 133b.
[10] see Exodus 33:19
[11] see Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 8.

One such approach is holiness, or what Otto termed the "extra-rational."[1] Standing apart from what Judaism describes as the limits of the purely intellectual, holiness "reaches out to God," and in its experiential, participatory and personified dimensions, "enables us to know Him."[2] For whether manifest in people, places, words or acts, when something is holy, it is, as Rav Simcha said, "transparent to its source"[3] and so "allows the Creator to be visible."[4] As an alternative, Divinely-appointed avenue of knowing God, holiness breaks with the confines of the intellect in isolation and instead "lifts us above our limited conceptions so that we can comprehend the Lord of the universe, insofar as it is humanly possible."[5] By answering God's call to participate in holiness, itself inherently participational, experiential and personal, mankind answers the call to know Him in these same dimensions.

At its most fundamental, the Judaic conceptualization of knowing God in holiness is relational, realized through a volitional, participatory encounter between God and man. "True, complete and fulfilled holiness," said Shapiro, "emerges as the product of the *interaction* between God Who hallows and man who actualizes the unrealized possibilities of holiness."[6] While both are necessary to this encounter, neither God's role as sanctifier nor man's as actualizer on its own is sufficient to bring about holiness. In this sense, just as the human intellect is incapable of knowing God on its own, so, too, is God's *hierophanic,* self-manifestation insufficient to create the conditions whereby man might come to know Him. In order for this "true, complete and fulfilled"[7] holiness-encounter to occur, God's sanctifying *hierophany* must be answered by man drawing near to Him in return. By virtue of the reciprocal acts by which man and God meet one another—with God sanctifying and man actualizing—the resultant encounter becomes an experiential, participatory, lived holiness—a "*fervid, human experience of knowing God,*"[8] the transparency of which allows one to see and know Him more clearly.

The actions that bring about such holiness-encounters follow a Divinely-sanctioned pattern. These are the commandments. "The singular form for ['commandment', or] מצוה (*mitzvah*)," said Patterson, "is derived from the Aramaic word צותא (*tsavta*), which designates a 'joining together.'"[9] The importance of such commandments, said Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, "lies not in its content or efficacy...but in the fact that it constitutes a point of contact with the Divine."[10] God approaches man by giving him a commandment, thereby extending him an invitation to participate with God in holiness. Man, in turn, responds to this invitation by obeying that command, approaching God as he does so. In this sense, while "the holiness of the commandments has its source in the holiness of the Commander,"[11] it is realized only when one keeps those commandments.[12] With this understanding that, as Maimonides said, "There is no difference between His saying, 'Ye shall be holy' and His having said, 'Do My commandments,'"[13] Shapiro's "true, complete and fulfilled"[14] holiness occurs not in God's

---

[1] Note that the subtitle of Rudolf Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* is "an inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational."
[2] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism,* 52.
[3] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 19.
[4] see Rabbi Michael Chighel, "What is 'holiness?'" Chabad.org, http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo /aid/ 676159/jewish/What-Is-Holiness.htm
[5] see Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism,* 52.
[6] ibid.
[7] ibid.
[8] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 8.
[9] Patterson, *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought,* 59.
[10] see Adin Steinsaltz, *Teshuvah: A Guide for the Newly Observant Jew* (New York: Free Press, 1987), 28.
[11] see Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 19.
[12] ibid., 18.
[13] Maimonides*, Introduction to the Book of Commandments*, principle 4.
[14] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism.*

sanctity alone, but when man answers that call by keeping His commandments. To be holy in this volitional, participatory and relational sense represents what Jewish scripture calls *kedushat kol ha-mitzvot* (קדושת כל המצות), the holiness of all the commandments.[1]

Within the broader context of God's aim to help mankind come to know Him, one of the principle purposes of this holiness-encounter is didactic. God extends invitations to mankind to participate in holiness so that, in the midst of that encounter, He might teach man to know Him. As such, God intends each encounter in holiness to be a teaching moment for Him and a learning experience for man. When God and man meet under these Divinely-sanctioned conditions, holiness emerges from its dormant potentiality to help mankind know God, in what Rav Gadi called the "suprarational" realm of encounter. This represents a Divinely-inspired, Heavenly epistemology, originating not in an anthropomorphic reaching from man to God in terms native to the human intellect, but in a didactic condescension of God to man whereby man is taught in and through the medium of holiness itself. It was this pedagogic dimension of the holiness-encounter to which Rav Ezra referred when I asked him about the relationship between teaching and holiness during our interview. "It's the same thing," he had said. "That's the point. They're not two different things. They're the same." Taking Moses' face-to-face encounter with God at Sinai as its archetype, holiness itself, in this light, *is* teaching and learning—with God as Teacher and man as learner.

God's invitation to study Torah is, again, not as much a matter of intellectual study as it is experiencing His Teaching under His tutelage. Though the term *torah* (תורה) can be interpreted in many ways, "the underlying idea of 'teaching' is common to all."[2] Interpreting Moses' reception of God's *Torah* at Sinai alternatively as Moses' having received God's *Teaching* at Sinai emphasizes the fundamental role of the teaching act itself. This, together with Rashi's interpretation of the term *chinuch* (חינוך) as a way to describe both the educative act and "the consecration of the altar in the holy temple,"[3] suggests that teaching and learning are not only an extension of holiness itself, but a means by which those who teach and learn are sanctified, elevated not only to experience God through holiness, but to come to know God by sharing in that holiness with Him.

Perhaps it is for this reason that scripture describes God's revelation of Torah to His people not as the giving of a gift external to Himself, but as giving of Himself[4]—that is, giving teaching and learning as the primary means whereby they might, in and through its holiness, come to know Him. Taking Sinai as its model, the archetypical holiness-encounter itself is nothing less than a one-on-one teaching moment with God. And so Torah study remains today, at least on a symbolic level, an encounter in holiness with the Divine through which God personally teaches all who respond to His invitation. "Be diligent in studying Torah [or, God's Teaching]," says the Talmud, "and know in whose Presence you toil."[5] And, as with learning, the Divine Presence also attends teaching moments[6] by manifesting itself in and through the personage of a living, human teacher, transforming such moments into holiness-encounters with God.

Ultimately, while the experientiality of holiness allows it to transcend the limits of human intellect and so enable man to begin the journey of coming to know God, holiness is not just an experience. "I can't simply experience holiness," explained Rav Gadi. "Holiness is superconscious. So, what am I left with? I'm left with learning." Whatever God had given

---

[1] see Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei*, 17.
[2] Louis Isaac Rabinowitz and Warren Harvey, "Torah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition,* ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 20. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 39.
[3] see Rashi's commentary on Parshat *Lech Lecha*
[4] see *Nefesh HaChaim* 4:10
[5] see *Pirkei Avot* 2:14
[6] see *B. Sanh.* 110a.

at Sinai, it would have been the means of connecting to Him through holiness. "If the Torah had been dance steps," Rav Gadi explained, "I would have danced. If what Moshe Rabbeinu had brought down from Sinai would have been chemistry books," he continued, "I would do chemistry. But he brought this down. In doing so, God is saying to me, 'Obviously, there's an impossible span between me and you, ungraspable and so on, and yet there's something that can be passed, like a tunnel, between me and you. That's why it is that Jews are so connected to the holy—because that was what was left there from the experience at Sinai." Of all that God could have given His people as a means to reach Him, He gave them teaching and learning—a holiness in which one might participate and through which one might come to know God both experientially and personally. Teaching and learning, then, is not just connected to holiness—it is, from this point of view, holiness itself.

## *Teaching, Learning and Reciprocal Sanctity*

*Unlike other yeshivas, Osher Shlomo was not meant for the ordinary student, determined to study hard while there, only to return to an old life once finished. This, instead, was a school for those in pursuit of the rabbinate, that one day they might pass the tradition to those who awaited them, eager to receive, in the many generations to come.*

A certain rabbi came to a place where, though they had decreed a fast, no rain fell, and the land was stricken with bitter want and hardship. No matter who came to help, neither prayers nor fasting could bring the drought to an end. One day, a visitor came to read from the Torah scroll before the congregation at the synagogue. The moment he read the words, "He causeth the wind to blow," a strong wind began to blow against the synagogue walls. Struck with amazement at the miracle, the congregation sat speechless, waiting for the mysterious man to continue his reading. When the wind had ceased, he read a final, simple line aloud: "He causeth the rain to fall." When he had spoken, the heavens opened, and rain immediately began to pour down upon the beleaguered little town, as everyone ran outside to see. But, staying behind, the rabbi asked, "Who are you? And what is your occupation?" Closing the scroll, the man reverently descended the steps of the altar and replied. "I," he said, "am a teacher."[1]

As seen earlier, teachers, together with their teachings, are not only held in exceptionally high regard in the Jewish tradition, but are themselves sanctified by virtue of the teaching they realize.[2] Whether they form the greater part of one's knowledge,[3] or a single insight which "enlightens the understanding,"[4] a teacher's words have the power to either invite or expel the Divine Presence[5] and even speak posthumously through text to the studious and diligent.[6] Only to the honest[7] and angelic[8] among Israel is the honor of teaching ever granted, whereby even a commoner is elevated above a king,[9] thenceforth to be reverenced with the fear of Heaven[10] as one would revere the Divine Presence itself.[11] And

[1] *B. Ta* 24a and *En Yaakov*, ad loc.
[2] see "Relational holiness: *khavrusa* and the rabbi-disciple relationship" in the previous chapter entitled *Farbrengen.*
[3] see Rav Judah's commentary in Song R. 1:3, §1.
[4] see Rav Yosi's reply to Rav Judah in Song R. 1:3, §1.
[5] *Ed* 1:3.
[6] *B. Shek* 7b.
[7] *Pirkei Avot* 2:5
[8] B. MK 17a.
[9] *Pirkei Avot* 6:3
[10] ibid. 4:12.
[11] *B. Sanh* 110a.

though he may renounce them, these honors are always with him,[1] with the promise that his "righteousness shall be as the stars" to endure forever.[2] Even the great Sages Ben Zakkai, Ezra, Joshua and Akiva all considered their teachers' knowledge far beyond their own, like a vast ocean compared to what the dip of a single paintbrush might pull from it.[3] Holiness itself depends upon such reverence, for, again, when its ancient inhabitants ceased to respect their teachers according to the mandate of Heaven, Jerusalem, the epicenter of Judaic holiness on earth, was destroyed.[4]

Among the most exceptional virtues which Jewish scripture consistently ascribes to teaching is its unique transformative influence over those who act as teacher. Though its struggle and sharpness can make enemies of friends at first, when consistently engaged-in, teaching can elevate the kindness of friendship to brotherly love.[5] Teaching so transformed the teacher-student relationship[6] anciently that it led many key figures in Hebrew scripture to call students their sons[7] and teachers their fathers.[8] Though in the eyes of his students a teacher may begin as a respected sage only,[9] the transformative power of pedagogy elevates him first to be like their father,[10] then as more of a father than he who raised them[11] and finally as though he were their Creator.[12] For in following God's commandment to teach as He taught Moses at Sinai,[13] teachers are to be, as scripture said of their Eternal Teacher, like loving fathers instructing little children in patience, kindness and love.[14] In so doing, teachers were given the capacity to call down the powers of Heaven on behalf of those in their care.[15]

Not only is learning under a teacher a Divine commandment[16] in the Talmudic tradition, far superior to learning without one,[17] but all those who are commanded to learn (from which none are exempt) are likewise commanded to teach.[18] In this sense, the Jewish scriptural tradition links teaching and learning together. Whatever one may learn, says the Talmud, he must not only be willing and able to teach, but actually must teach it himself to another during his lifetime. Herein lies a crucial connection between teaching and learning, upon the integrity of which hinges the sanctity of both. Of the Psalm, "Though wealth and riches are in his house, his generosity endureth forever,"[19] the Talmudic sage Rav Huna said, "This applies to a man who studies Torah and teaches it to others."[20] Though wealth and riches may come to one so dedicated to teach what he learns, these are eclipsed by the sanctifying transformation that comes upon one who, privileged to learn the wealth and riches of Torah, begins thereafter to teach it selflessly to another. Consecrated by their generous intent to pass to the next generation what they had received from the last, those who

---

[1] *B. Kid* 32a. "So, God, renouncing the honor due Him, condescended to act as a guide for Israel."
[2] B. BB 8b., referring to Daniel 12:3
[3] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:3, §1.
[4] *P. Hag* 1:7, 76c.
[5] *B. Kid* 30b.
[6] *Sif* Deuteronomy, §34.
[7] see 2 Chronicles 29:11
[8] see 2 Kings 2:12 and 2 Kings 13:14
[9] *Pirkei Avot* 6:3
[10] *Sif* Deuteronomy, §34.; *B. Sanh* 19b.
[11] B. BM 33a.; *B. Kid* 32a.
[12] *Tos Hor* 2:7
[13] *B. Ber* 63b.
[14] ARN 8.
[15] *B. Ta* 24a and *En Yaakov*, ad loc.
[16] *Pirkei Avot* 1:6; ARN 8.
[17] *B. Ket* 111a.
[18] *Kiddushin* 29b.
[19] Psalms 112:3
[20] *B. Ket* 50a.

study in order to teach, says the Talmud, are endowed with a greater capacity to teach.[1] In the Jewish scriptural tradition, then, learning linked to teaching (in the teleological sense) is preferable to learning by itself.

The Talmud emphatically states that one who studies Torah and does not teach what he has learned to another is considered as one who hates the very words of God he studies."[2] A person such as this, says Torah, "has broken God's commandment" and with "his iniquities upon him...shall be utterly cut off."[3] Recalling the dependence of Judaic holiness upon one's connection and proximity to God as the source of that sanctity, being so "cut off" from God's presence and power is tantamount to one's personal separation from holiness. Without its purposive connection to teaching, then, learning is cut off from its consecratory source.[4] In this sense, both the quality and sanctity of one's learning depend on one's intent to teach that learning to another. The locus of learning's sanctity, then, lies not within itself, but outside itself—not as an end to the educative process, but as a preparatory steppingstone to the more central act of teaching another.

Teaching and learning are further connected when considered in light of their shared linguistic origins. Considering that two of the primary Hebrew terms for teaching[5] and learning[6] are derived from the same root, L-M-D (ל-מ-ד), the two terms share a single, more fundamental meaning in common. Both in contemporary lexical analysis[7] as well as Judaic scriptural exegesis,[8] the same Hebrew term is often interpreted as either "teaching," "learning," or both. "The Hebrew language," said Patterson, "reveals the fundamental oneness of teaching and learning in the single root למד, from which both words are derived."[9] Though the phrase *talmud torah* (תלמוד תורה)—a term commonly used in scripture to describe the Judaic educative process[10]—is often translated as "Torah study," said Levi, its meaning "subsumes teaching as well."[11] Jastrow's Aramaic lexicon suggests that not only is *talmud torah* (תלמוד תורה) translated as both "teaching"[12] and "learning"[13] in different contexts, but these meanings often overlap with one another to suggest, again, a more fundamental meaning shared at the heart of both.[14]

Though Patterson describes teaching and learning as "two words for a single event,"[15] Widder's more thorough analysis suggests that teaching and learning, though parallel and closely related, are not identical in either their lexical meaning or their method of realization.[16] Those who maintain that teaching and learning are connected (which is no

---

[1] *Pirkei Avot* 4:5
[2] see Rav Meir's commentary on Numbers 15:31 in B. Sanh 99a.
[3] see Numbers 15:31
[4] see again Rav Meir's commentary on Numbers 15:31 in *B. Sanh* 99a.
[5] i.e., "*limed"* (לימד) in the *pi'el* (פיעל)
[6] i.e., *"lamad"* (למד) in the *Qal* (קל)
[7] While the Brown-Driver-Briggs Lexicon translates the L-M-D (ל-מ-ד) lexeme primarily as "learn," Strong's Exhaustive Concordance places "teach" at the heart of its meaning. This lexical parallelism suggests that teaching and learning are fundamentally linked to one another on an etymological level.
[8] The scriptural debate recorded in Kiddushin 29b depicts Talmudic exegetes interpreting the same word *v'limadtem* (ולמדתם) interchangeably as either "and they shall teach" or "and they shall learn"
[9] Patterson, *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought,* 165.
[10] see, for instance, *Mishnah Peah* 1:1
[11] see Levi, *Torah Study: A Survey of Classic Sources on Timely Issues*, 226.
[12] see *Shebu* 40b & *B. Mets.* 33b
[13] see Y. Gill VII 48c & Y. Hor. III 48b
[14] see entry for *"talmud"* in Marcus Jastrow, *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud and Midrashic Literature* (London: Luzac, 1926).
[15] Patterson, *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought,* 165.
[16] see Wendy Widder, *To Teach in Ancient Israel: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of a Biblical Hebrew Lexical Set* (Boston: de Gruyter, 2014), 122.

longer the consensus among educationalists[1]) often illustrate that connection as a causal one, saying that teaching is only connected to learning inasmuch as it brings about learning as a measurable result.[2] The nature of the teaching-learning connection as described in Hebrew scripture, however, isn't causal, but teleological, in that learning is only acceptable before God when done with the intent to teach afterward. Widder concludes her analysis of the lexical set L-M-D (ל-מ-ד)—teaching and learning—by illustrating how it departs from what she calls a strictly "universal" model of education. Rather than involve only three entities—namely, teacher, student and content—this element of Judaic teaching and learning extends its reach to a fourth part: the next generation of students. In her depiction of L-M-D (ל-מ-ד), Widder clearly states that "the student acquires and masters the content *and* is responsible to assume the role of teacher for a new generation."[3] The act of *talmud torah* (תלמוד תורה), then, which encompasses both teaching and learning, is not aimed at achieving observable student learning as an end goal, but as a preliminary step in the becoming process whereby that student may become teacher to another. In the Jewish tradition, this pattern of student-become-teacher transformationality extends back to Moses' apprenticeship with God at Sinai, as well as from the present generation to the next. In this way, teaching and learning are eternal—not only in the eschatological sense, but in the inter-generational educative acts of the present.

The Talmud compares this process to lighting a candle. A teacher holds the light of his learning close to that of his student until the new flame is kindled, then takes his candle away, allowing the new flame to burn strongly enough to light the flame of another.[4] The purpose of this 'light of learning,' then, is not static, but active.[5] Like the light of a candle, its purpose resides not within itself, but outside itself. Learning, like light, exists not simply to be, but to illuminate others. "We are dealing here," said Boman, "with neither a 'being' nor a 'becoming' but with a dynamic third possibility, therefore more an 'effecting' as in the case of the verb 'lighten' which means not only to be bright or become bright, but also to make light effective, i.e., illuminate."[6] In this sense, the purpose of both teaching and learning in the Jewish tradition is a selfless one. And it is only in the oneness of teaching and learning, united in this selfless purpose to pass the tradition to the next generation, that both are approved by God and can become sanctified by virtue of such Divine approval.

Neither teaching nor learning in isolation can be connected to God. When realized together, linked by the selfless intent of both teacher and student to teach another, they can both be sanctified. Considered in light of the embodied, lived nature of both holiness as well as teaching and learning, however, it isn't the unification of teaching and learning alone that is the means of their sanctification. It is, instead, the unification of a teacher and a student. In order for teaching and learning to be made holy, both a teacher as well as his student must make room for one another so that a moment of consecratory encounter may take place. On the part of the teacher, this "making room" process is called *tsimstum* (צמצום). In imitation of the act whereby "God put Himself aside to create an empty space in which the universe came

---

[1] see, for example, Rita Astuti, "Death, Ancestors and the Living Dead: Learning without Teaching in Madagascar" in *Children's Understanding of Death: from Biological to Religious Conceptions,* ed. Victoria Talwar, Paul L. Harris and Michael Schleifer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1-18; Kathleen McNutt and Jeremy Rayner, "Is Learning Without Teaching Possible? The Productive Tension Between Network Governance and Reflexivity," *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning,* 2014.

[2] see, for instance, Jennifer M. Case, "Emergent Interactions: Rethinking the Relationship between Teaching and Learning," *Teaching in Higher Education* 20, no. 6 (2015); Ann Darling, "The lecture and the Learning Paradigm," *Communication Education* 66, no. 2 (2017): 253-255.

[3] see Widder, *To Teach in Ancient Israel*, 122.

[4] Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:3, §1.

[5] Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 33.

[6] ibid., p. 31.

into being," explained Rav Yonatan, "the teacher finds a way to make something expansive and eternal into something much smaller" so that a student might understand. "The focus," he explained, "is compassion for the recipient, and the secret is harmony."

The student, in the meantime, goes through a process of *bitul* (ביטול) whereby he humbles himself, emptying and preparing the inner vessels whereby he might receive further light from his teacher. Meeting together in this space—wherein the honed invitation of a teacher meets the humble desire of a student to learn—God is present, and being present consecrates the encounter for the good of both. Like the Talmudic passage that describes companions in Torah as like the very Presence of God,[1] the educative encounter, explained Elihu, is like the two cherubim on the ark of the covenant: when they are linked to one another—when the teacher can receive the student, and the student the teacher—God sits in their midst, and sanctifies them both.

In sum, a student in the Jewish educative tradition does not learn with learning in mind as the end of a linear process. The teleological epicenter of learning and teaching in Judaism is, instead, to teach another: not to teach just each other, but rather to be prepared to teach a third person not yet present. In light of the orality of Jewish education, the embodied nature of holiness and the extra-propositional nature of sacred knowledge, writing alone seems insufficient to fulfill this commandment. In the ideal sense depicted in Jewish scripture, as well as at *Osher Shlomo,* this teaching must be done in person, during one's lifetime, passing the light of one's learning to another with the same care with which one would light a candle. It is in the moment of this encounter between such candles of Torah teaching and learning (which the Talmud compares to an encounter with God[2]) that both are sanctified. In short, isolated from one another, neither teaching nor learning is sacred alone. But together, united by the consecratory intent of both teachers and learners to pass their learning to another, teaching and learning are seen as sacred acts.

## *Divine Pedagogic Influence*

*For those at Osher Shlomo, the purpose of learning wasn't to earn a hermitish lifestyle at the end of a life of scholarly isolation. It was, instead, to receive light in order to share light and in the midst of that Divine proximity, be filled with His holiness.*

In the Jewish educative tradition, the importance of the pedagogic encounter at Sinai cannot be overemphasized. However, viewed within the broader context of Written and Oral Torah, it was not only *what* God taught at Sinai that was important, but *how* he taught it. In this respect, the teaching methods, structures and circumstances employed by God at Sinai are seen as Divinely-inspired pedagogic principles after which all teaching and learning encounters thereafter are modeled. At the heart of all these are two fundamental features upon which all the rest depend: first, that God was present, and second, that, once present, He took part in the teaching and learning process itself as an active, contributing participant. In order for present educative encounters to attain the same sanctity and efficacy as was present at Sinai (something the Talmud repeatedly maintains is possible[3]), one must not only imitate *how* God taught, but also fulfill these two, most fundamental conditions. When God participates as a discernibly-present contributor to the human educative act, such conditions not only meet the requirements of Judaic sanctity by Divine proximity, but also embody

[1] Song of Songs *Rabba* 2:5, §3; Leviticus *Rabba* 34:8.
[2] ibid.
[3] *B. Sher* 63b.

Eliadean sanctity, that is, God's discernible presence by *hierophany*, as well as man's communion with Him by *sacramental* co-participation through teaching and learning.[1]

As for the first of these conditions, Hebrew scripture repeatedly and consistently affirms that God can and does attend present-day teaching and learning moments in a way comparable to His presence at Sinai. "When two sit together and words of Torah are spoken between them," states the Talmud, "the Presence abides with them."[2] Whether ten,[3] five,[4] three,[5] two,[6] or even a single person[7] studies Torah, the Talmud maintains, the Presence of God abides there in that moment.[8] Far from being only a shadowy reflection of Sinai's superlative sanctity, the Presence which attends contemporary pedagogic encounters is of the same quality, efficacy and degree of sanctity as that which attended Moses on that occasion. Under such conditions, one not only feels the "awe, fear, trembling and trepidation" of Sinai,[9] but its same joy[10] and struggle, as well.[11]

Neither in this, nor other Judaic contexts, is God's Presence understood as passive. The Judaic conceptualization of God stipulates that His Presence is, instead, dynamic and active.[12] Judaism's orthopractic emphasis, in this sense, extends beyond the mortal realm, its focus on action and practice just as applicable to God as to man. From this perspective, God is not "a philosophical abstraction," but One who "manifests His presence"[13] as "a participant in the life of the community."[14] Jewish scripture illustrates Him not in terms of carefully-formed religious dogmas, but "prefers to endow God with personality to which it gives the warmth and beauty of positive characterization."[15] Apart from scripture itself, Jewish worship "assumes that God is a full participant in its function, and the laws pertaining to its use assume that God...is as accessible to the community as its rabbinic leaders are."[16] Even God's first act of sanctification whereby the Sabbath day became holy wasn't a means of distancing or removing Himself from the world, but was a way to "continue to care for His creatures" even more closely than before.[17] Dwelling with mankind in this way,[18] mankind remains the focal point[19] of God's loving interest"[20] to uplift and to purify[21] His creations.

Teaching and learning is among the most central ways in which God participates in human experience. His role in teaching and learning didn't end when He taught Moses Torah.

---

[1] see Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*.
[2] *Pirkei Avot* 3:2
[3] see Psalms 82:1
[4] see Amos 9:6
[5] see Psalms 82:1
[6] see Malachi 3:16
[7] see Exodus 20:24
[8] *Pirkei Avot* 3:6
[9] *B. Ber* 22a.
[10] *B. Sher* 63b.
[11] *Sif. Deut.,* §307
[12] Hannah Hashkes, "God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 44, no. 2 (2013): 270.
[13] Israel Abrahams, Joshua Gutmann, Yehoshua M. Grintz, Marvin Fox, Gershom Scholem and Alexander Altmann, "God" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition,* ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 7. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 653.
[14] Hashkes, *God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority*, 257.
[15] Abrahams et al., "God," *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 657.
[16] Hashkes, *God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority*, 258.
[17] see Psalms 104
[18] see Isaiah 57:15
[19] see Psalms 8:5
[20] Abrahams et al., "God," *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 654.
[21] see Psalms 119:29, 40, 68

After teaching him directly,[1] God is believed to continually "participate in the human activity of transmitting" His Teaching from generation to generation.[2] In this sense, not only is God the source of all knowledge,[3] but man's relationship with Him "flowers in an evolutionary process of education."[4] Depicting teaching and learning in the Jewish tradition as "a form of prayer," Peterson draws a parallel between the term for "prayer" (*tefilah*—תפילה) and one of its Hebrew cognates, *naftulim* (נפתולים), meaning "struggles" or "wrestlings."[5] Taken together with the reflexive nature of the verb "to pray" (lahitpalel—להתפלל), understanding teaching and learning as prayer implies that it, like prayer, is fundamentally reciprocal, requiring the active involvement of multiple participants, "struggling" and "wrestling" with one another in the educative process.

This Divine pedagogic influence on teaching and learning is also linked to two other Judaic dimensions of God in the world: the Holy Spirit, or *ruach hakodesh* (רוח הקודש) and the Divine Presence, or *shekinah* (שכינה). Though the Talmud stipulates that, "when the last of the prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, died, the Holy Spirit ceased from Israel,"[6] in non-prophetic contexts, "the Holy Spirit also rests on charismatic or exceptionally holy individuals."[7] Two groups are specifically mentioned as especially influenced by the *ruach hakodesh* (רוח הקודש): those who teach[8] and those who learn.[9] Sometimes used synonymously with God Himself,[10] the *ruach hakodesh* (רוח הקודש) is "theologically incontrovertible" in its role as it "works through man as divine inspiration."[11] Whether seen from Philo's perspective as a "unique, corporeal soul" functioning as an "intermediary of divine communications to man,[12] Herman Cohen's as a symbol for man's direct connection to God,[13] or even Kohler's as simply God's gift of reason to mankind,[14] the *ruach hakodesh* (רוח הקודש) is consistently depicted as a means by which God can be involved in the inspiration and teaching of His people, and is passed on from master to disciple in an unbroken chain from God at Sinai to the present moment.[15]

The Divine Presence, or *shekinah* (שכינה), often used synonymously with the *ruach hakodesh* (רוח הקודש), is what the Talmud specifically depicts as being present in all teaching encounters.[16] According to Judah HaLevi and Saadiah Gaon, God's presence in the form of the *shekinah* (שכינה) represents *ha-inyan ha-elohi* (הענין האלוי), or the Divine influence, whereby the holiness of God is manifest. This holiness endows individuals with "pure spiritual power" by dwelling among them, bearing their sorrows, and toiling with them in all

---

[1] Abrahams et al., "God," *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 656.
[2] Hashkes, *God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority*, 254.
[3] Abrahams et al., "God," *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* 657: "In addition to spiritual option, the Creator, as has been stated, gave man knowledge."
[4] ibid.
[5] see Patterson, *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought,* 161.
[6] see *Yoma* 9b
[7] see cf. SER, 10:48
[8] see Song of Songs *Rabba* 1:1 no. 8
[9] see SEZ, 1
[10] Alan Unterman, Howard Kreisel and Rivka G. Horwitz, "Ruach HaKodesh" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition,* ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 17. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 506-507.
[11] ibid., 507.
[12] see Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Vol. 2,* 32.
[13] see Herman Cohen, *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums* (Germany: Marix Verlag, 1929), 116-130.
[14] see Kohler, *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered,* 200 ff.
[15] see Deuteronomy 24:9; 2 Kings 2:9-10; Unterman, Kreisel and Horwitz, "Ruach HaKodesh" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 507.
[16] see *Ber.* 6a.

affliction,[1] including that of teaching and learning. Whatever the specific nature of God's self-manifestation to man in this hierophanic dimension, the overarching message of Jewish scripture concerning God's influence in the world is that He can and does inspire those engaged in the act of teaching and learning, illuminating the human intellect and dynamically conversing with man.

Beyond attending pedagogic encounters, God specifically aids in the learning process. If a student seeks Him out, asking, as it were, for His direct involvement and intervention in His learning, He will respond.[2] When I asked Rav Simcha how he consecrated his teaching and learning, he told me, "You just say to God, 'What do you want to teach me?' It's a matter of being conscious that you are learning God's words and to then have the humility to say, 'Okay, please teach me.' In doing so, you realize that this power [the power to teach and learn] is a gift from something much greater than yourself." God knows how to help His people learn, said Rawidowicz, because He "learns with Israel, learns always and everywhere."[3] Whenever and wherever Teaching is studied, "God also participates in this study,"[4] and, "if the sons study Torah and conclude with exalting the father's name, then God responds accordingly"[5] by positively intervening in that study, making it of a different quality that it might have otherwise been.

God not only contributes to learning in this context, but to teaching, as well. Though He is ultimately the Teacher of all, He allows His people to teach one another (especially their children), and in so doing become co-creators and co-teachers with Him. By saying that "Everything is in the power of Heaven except the reverence of Heaven,"[6] the Talmud illustrates that God does not force His people to obey any of His commandments, especially that of teaching. Instead, He creates the conditions whereby man can choose for himself—not out of compulsion, but out of love for God.[7] In this sense, though "each and every day a divine voice goes forth from Sinai,"[8] teaching Torah to His people, God also helps mankind teach themselves. When His people "teach the Torah," said Hashkes, "the rabbis allow God to play a part within this discourse in a status resembling that of a 'First among Equals.'"[9] The moment teaching begins in a Jewish context, "religious discourse commences," and "God takes a place *within* the discourse and participates in it together with the other human minds" involved.[10]

When this Divine inspiration comes upon a teacher, said Rav Gadi, "he begins explaining it just as he's prepared beforehand. But as he's explaining, he taps into what he needs to tap into. Suddenly," he continued, "there's a whole other level of explanation, and now you have to gather your thoughts. It's not so simple." Describing his own experience with such direct, Divine involvement in his teaching, Rav Gadi went on, "The best times are when you've finished and you feel that there is no way in the world that I could have said what I just said. It's like an experience of, 'Where did this come from?' If I would have built this as a lecture, I never would have come to what I just said." The impact of such moments of Divine pedagogic intervention, he explained, could be seen in the faces of those he taught. "It's not from me," he said. "You feel that it was a gift that wasn't in the book. That's what it means that the Torah is infinite. I can't tell you ahead of time where we're going to go. I can

---

[1] see Unterman et al., "Shekinah" in Encyclopaedia Judaica, 442.
[2] Hashkes, *God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority*, 277.
[3] Rawidowicz, *Israel: the Ever Dying People and Other Essays*, 135.
[4] Hashkes, *God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority*, 272.
[5] ibid., 277.
[6] *Ber.* 33b.
[7] *Ber.* 63b.
[8] *Pirkei Avot* 6:2
[9] Hashkes, *God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority*, 255.
[10] ibid.

only tell you where we're going to start. I can't tell you where we're going to end." After relating his story, Rav Gadi added with remarkable candor, "And, by the way, this is true for learning Talmud, and it's true for learning everything." In light of Rav Gadi's experience and narrative, then, God doesn't just influence and participate as a partner in teaching Torah, but does so regardless of the subject matter being taught, so long as it fits within the parameters sanctioned by scripture.

Passages like the Psalm, "Teach me, Lord, Your way,"[1] depict God not as One who issues decrees and judgments, but as a Father and Teacher of His people.[2] "Teaching," said Levinas, "is a way for the truth to be produced such that it is not my work, such that I could not derive it from my own interiority."[3] As Rav Levi Klein used to tell his students when complimented on the quality of his lessons, "It isn't mine."[4] In the Jewish tradition, God is what lies beyond man's interiority, and His wisdom, when given the chance to flourish among those who teach and learn with His aid, sows seeds of holiness in the world.[5] When Jewish prayers refer consistently to God as the *ribon kol ha'olam* (רבון כל העולמים), the phrase depicts Him as simultaneously Master of the universe as well as its Teacher. "From a Jewish point of view, then," said Patterson, "the process of teaching and learning exceeds even the relation of disciple and master. For there is always a third party involved in the process, the One who gives it meaning."[6]

One Midrashic tale tells of when Elijah the prophet met a man on a road who, having refused to teach and learn Torah, mocked and reviled him. So, Elijah asked him, "My son, since you have refused to learn Torah, what will you say to God on the Day of Judgment?" The man, still mocking him, answered confidently, "I have an answer for you already. Heaven has given me neither understanding, nor knowledge, nor even spirit. So, how could I study Torah with no help from Heaven?" Troubled, the prophet replied, "My son, what do you do for work?" He replied, "I trap birds and fish." "Who gave you the knowledge to do such a thing?" asked Elijah. "Understanding and knowledge to do all these things were given me from Heaven," the man responded, matter-of-factly. To this, the prophet Elijah offered this lesson: "To take flax, spin it into cords, weave cords into nets, and use nets to trap fish and fowls, understanding and knowledge were given to you from Heaven. But do you suppose that, for words of Torah, about which it is written, 'The word is very nigh unto thee' (Deuteronomy 30:14), understanding and knowledge were not given to you?"[7]

Though the story does not tell of what happened to the stubborn man who had shunned his studies, the message is that God is not a passive, silent observer of what goes on in the world. On the contrary, He is actively involved in all that concerns His people, especially their teaching and learning. And so, in this context, one is never alone in the educative act, but is always accompanied by God—not as a passive observer, but as an active participant. In doing so, He is believed to make more of that teaching and learning than it might have otherwise been had not the consecratory volition of man called His sanctifying Presence down from Heaven to accompany, influence and participate in such Divinely-sanctioned pedagogy.

[1] see Psalms 27:11
[2] see Peterson, *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought,* 164.
[3] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969), 295.
[4] see Patterson, *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought,* 165.
[5] ibid.
[6] ibid., 164.
[7] *Tanhuma, Va-yelekh,* §2; TdEZ 14; *Yalkut, Nitzavim,* §960

## Summary

This chapter began by illustrating some of the uniquely human dimensions of sanctity in education, highlighting sanctity's experiential and embodied nature. It continued by suggesting how the experiential embodiment of sanctified teaching and learning awakens sanctity from its dormancy to realize what is seen as the Godly potential inherent in both the process itself and those who realize it. Once realized by the collective efforts of both God and man, this holiness acts as a pedagogic encounter between them wherein God teaches man who He is and how to become like Him. The chapter then focused on how the sanctity of human learning depends upon its purposive orientation toward using that learning to teach another. Such teaching and learning can only be sanctified, the chapter concludes, through God's active participation in them. In sum, this chapter outlined the unique, yet crucial roles of both God and man in the sanctification of teaching and learning in this context.

# CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

The *Mishnah* tells of an aged king who, already long since awake and ready for a day's journey, shook two of his servants from sleep in the early hours just before dawn. Before they could rub the sleep from their eyes, he grasped their hands in his and rushed out the door and into the sunrise. "I am going on a journey," he told them, gazing fixedly at the horizon. "I won't be gone long. But," he said, throwing a sack and a bundle for each at their feet, "I wanted to give you these before I left." Still blinking in the steadily growing sunlight, and as yet unaware of exactly what lay inside, they thanked him clumsily for their gifts, and bowed as the king, promising he would return soon, walked steadily out of sight.

No sooner had he lost sight of the king than the first servant opened the gifts and looked inside. But neither the twinkle of gems nor a shimmer of gold greeted him as he pulled the first bag open. In the still dim light of an early morning, the servant plunged his hand greedily into the first bag. As he drew it forth, he felt not the kingly touch of a fortune for the taking, but the patter of a fistful of grain as it slipped through his fingers. "Wheat," he thought to himself as he rushed to examine the bundle. He looked at it more closely before letting it fall beside the bag. "Flax," he muttered. Wondering within himself at the meaning of such strange gifts, he turned to commiserate with his companion. "What does the king think he's..."

But he never finished his question. As he turned to look upon his friend, instead of the kneeling figure and furrowed brow of one as confused as he, he saw his fellow servant already walking briskly homeward, a sack and a bundle slung heavily over each shoulder. Leaving his own gifts where they had been given, he ran quickly after his companion. "Wait!" he cried. "Where are you going?" Stopping a moment, and letting the bag fall heavily to the ground, he turned to face his friend and smiled. "To work," he said. Not losing an instant, he slung the bag over his shoulder again, then walked briskly off into what had become the warm sunlight of an early morning, slowly disappearing from sight as the king had done only moments before.

Shaking his head to himself, the first servant looked from his disappearing companion to the gifts at his feet. But as the thought of lifting them weighed more heavily on his mind, the memory of his bed and the early morning dawned upon him. And so, leaving his kingly gifts behind, he went back to bed, quickly falling back to sleep. And there, far from the troubling puzzle of his master's wheat and flax, he slept for hours—far longer, in fact, than he would have had the king been there to see.

With the sun far higher than when the king had gone, the servant awoke. Blinking in the strong light of the late morning, he took only a few tentative steps before his feet struck something that at first they did not recognize. He looked down only to find the gifts again at his feet—still sitting in the very spot where the king's hand last touched them. But even as his thoughts fixed upon the curious gifts below, his concentration waned when the sight of his friend hard at work in the distance caught his wandering eye. But as he drew closer, he was shocked to see his friend grinding the wheat into flour while stalks of flax lay everywhere at his feet. "What are you doing?" cried the servant to his friend. "These gifts belong to the king!" Still grinding with both hands, his friend looked up, shook his head and chuckled softly to himself before returning to his work.

Still in disbelief at this irreverence for the king's property, the servant walked slowly home. Finding himself free from the king's vigilant supervision, however, he went about his daily chores a little more slowly than usual. After an especially long lunch, he returned to visit his friend, who had only stopped once all that day to eat a hasty meal before returning to his work. In place of wheat, there sat a ball of dough rising in the noonday sun; and instead of scattered stalks of flax, his friend worked on a loom to comb and weave their fibers into a

large cloth. He was going to ask what had happened to the gifts the king had given, but as he stared at the work unfolding before him, he noticed his friend had stopped to stare right back. Catching his gaze, his friend smiled just as before, chuckled, then slowly shook his head as he returned his undivided attention to the flax, the loom and the mass of dough rising nearby.

Puzzling more than ever at his friend's strange behavior, the servant left to finish what little work he could before sunset. Applying himself more halfheartedly than usual, he tried as he worked to think of anything but the startling change that had come over his friend. Ever since he had received his gifts, he had hardly looked up from his work for a moment all day. What's more, he had completely ruined what he had been given. Though his lukewarm labor dragged on through the late afternoon, the time went more quickly as he churned, ground and weaved a multitude of questions over and over in his mind.

Before long, the sun began to set and he found himself sitting beside his own two gifts where that long and curious day had begun. And though he had not put in a hard day's work, he was tired and glad at the chance to rest, if only for a moment. But just as his eyes began to droop, he was startled back to wakefulness by the sudden sound that came from inside the doorway. Disheveled, covered in flour and flaxen fiber, his friend threw the simple cloth from before, now finished, on a table, then scurried quickly away. When he returned, he was carrying a freshly baked loaf of bread in his hands as carefully as if it were a child. If the servant hadn't been awake before, the welcome smell of that freshly-baked bread drove all thoughts of sleep from his mind. But just as the setting sun disappeared behind the horizon, a figure appeared behind the servant in the doorway.

The king laid a hand on his shoulder and stepped inside. The unwise servant would have asked forgiveness then, but the king raised one hand to silence him. In the other he held a basket of food fit for a king, but more than any one king could eat alone. Both servants bowed, falling to their knees in reverence at his arrival, neither taking their eyes off him for a moment. Surveying his two servants, he turned and looked at the wheat and flax sitting untouched just outside the doorway, exactly where he had placed them that very morning. Guessing whose gifts they were, he looked fixedly into the eyes of the unwise servant.

After what seemed an eternity, he turned his gaze on the table spread before him, adorned with a new cloth on which lay a fresh loaf of handmade bread. Looking to his wise servant, he gave him his hand and, placing his own offering of kingly food upon the freshly laid cloth, offered his servant a seat at the table. With a wave of his hand, but not a second glance, the king sent the unwise servant away. Then, breaking the bread and unpacking the basket of food, he and the wise servant shared a meal whose invitation had come just before dawn that very morning—not by paper or pen, but in a bag of wheat and a bundle of flax. As the unwise servant took one last glance back at the scene, the vision that greeted his resentful eyes surprised him, for his friend had changed. Before him at the table sat not a master and his servant, but two kingly figures sharing a meal together as friends after a hard day's work.[1]

---

Before I pored over volumes of scripture with Dov in *khavrusa* (חברותא), walked in holiness with Rav Levi, or sang at a *farbrengen* late into the night, I asked a single question: *what is the nature of the relationship between Judaic holiness and the dynamics of Jewish teaching and learning practices?* More than a dozen themes across the last three chapters have explored dynamic responses to this question, highlighting methodological, experiential, teleological, relational, environmental, structural and theological dimensions of the sacred in

[1] Story adapted from Holtz, *Back to the Sources,* 28-29.

Jewish educative practice. Yet, at the heart of all these is the relationship between the servant and the king from this story—or, in this context, the relationship between God and man.

For the servants in the story, the king's gifts of wheat and flax were an invitation to act. By their nature, these raw materials had the potential to become bread and cloth. However, that potential was conditional upon volitional human action. Without someone to sift, grind and weave them, those basic ingredients could not realize the full measure of their potential. They had to be worked using appropriate techniques with an understanding of what they could become. So guided by suitable practice and oriented by proper intent, the inherent, dormant potentiality of these raw ingredients could be realized and eventually lead to a communion with the king that without them might never have been possible.

Like the gifts of wheat and flax, those at *Merkaz David, Or Akiva* and *Osher Shlomo* see teaching and learning as a Divine invitation to act. Like the ingredients from the story, the value of teaching and learning lies in their realization by volitional human action. At these yeshivas, rabbis and their disciples respond to what they see as God's invitation to teach and learn by doing what Rav Simcha called "certain, non-ordinary acts." When they do so with the proper intent and purpose, God is believed to actively contribute to their teaching and learning as a co-participant with them.[1] As man and God teach and learn together in this way, the process and those involved therein are both sanctified. Co-consecrated in this way, the inherent potential of both the educative act itself as well as the souls of all those who bring it to life is awakened from its dormancy to attain and become what Shapiro called "the true measure of holiness."[2] Under these conditions, those who teach and learn in a sacred way realize the dormant potentiality of the educative act and in so doing become themselves a living realization of the dormant potentiality inherent within them.

In other words, teaching and learning in this context not only sanctify[3] those who teach and learn by connecting them to God,[4] but *are themselves seen as a sacred act,* "a holy pursuit"[5] "ordained by God."[6] To say, then, that teaching and learning in this setting are only closely-related to holiness would be incomplete. From the perspective of those at *Merkaz David, Or Akiva* and *Osher Shlomo* (informed by Jewish academic literature and sacred texts), teaching and learning are not just closely-related to holiness, but are, instead, holy acts. They are, as Rav Ezra put it, "not two different things—they are the same"—a fundamental means by which mankind can respond to what is considered God's larger invitation at the very heart of Judaism, that is, to be holy even as he is holy.[7]

Understanding that education in this context is seen to be a holy act lays a crucial foundation for answering my original question. Together with an understanding of Judaic holiness as a dormant, efficacious potentiality inherent in meaningful acts and those who realize them, this foundation leads to two further questions. First, if teaching and learning are considered holy acts in the dormant-inherent sense, how does mankind realize those acts in a way that awakens their dormant potentiality? And second, inasmuch as holy acts in Judaism are seen to be efficacious, what actually happens when the dormant, inherent potentiality of education's sanctity is realized? In short, how do these rabbis and their disciples treat teaching and learning as a sacred activity, and what is believed to happen when they do?

---

[1] Hanan Alexander, *God as Teacher: Jewish Reflections on a Theology of Pedagogy*.
[2] Shapiro, *The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism,* 8.
[3] Neusner, introduction to *Invitation to the Talmud,* xvii-xxii.
[4] Kadushin, *The Rabbinic Mind,* 213.
[5] Steinberg, *Basic Judaism,* 67.
[6] Holtz, *Back to the Sources,* 24.
[7] Leviticus 19:2

As for the first of these refining questions, in this context, the sanctity of teaching and learning is made conditional upon two things: first, that mankind teach and learn as prescribed in sacred texts (i.e., using sacred methods); and second, that they do so with the proper intent (i.e., with consecratory purpose). Among these communities, God (Himself the very definition of holiness) is believed to teach and learn every day. As such, teaching and learning in a sacred way means patterning one's educative actions, intent and character after God, the archetypal teacher-learner, imitating His ways and attributes in order to become like Him in the process. This activity of *imitatio dei* whereby man draws closer to, communes with and imitates God to become like Him (itself at the very heart of Judaic holiness[1]) applies here both in the general sense (i.e., taking upon oneself His Divine characteristics[2]) as well as the more specific, educative sense (i.e., teaching as He teaches, and learning as He learns[3]). Importantly, this pedagogic theosimilitude comes about only experientially. This sacred dimension of teaching and learning cannot be understood propositionally alone, but instead is realized in and through direct, first-person participation and experience.

When mankind teaches and learns in these appointed ways, God is believed to respond in kind by becoming involved Himself in the process. That involvement consecrates both those who teach and learn as well as the acts by which they do so. The sanctification of these acts and those who enact them is understood to be discernibly efficacious. In other words, when sanctified, both those who teach and learn as well as the acts of teaching and learning themselves undergo a fundamental change. Just like the wheat and flax that became bread and cloth in the story, this change in teaching and learning is not an improvement upon an existing process, but a fundamental change whereby both man and his educative acts become Godly. This change is not one of quality, but a change in nature, purpose and capacity. Patterned after God as the archetypal teacher and learner, those who engage in this eternal endeavor, along with the teaching and learning they enact, connect to and become like God and His way of teaching and learning. For as the wheat and flax did not just result in bread and cloth, but ultimately the chance to share a meal with the king, so, too, are teaching and learning seen as a way to connect to, commune with and become like God who, in this context, is understood to be holiness itself.

Under the auspices of this sanctified change, the pedagogic act and those who enact it are believed to be endowed with the capacity to accomplish that which was theretofore impossible. Most importantly, this includes enabling those who teach and learn to draw closer to, imitate and become like God. In doing so, they become holy as God is holy, thereby fulfilling the very purpose for which Jewish scripture stipulates that God instituted holiness among mankind in the first place. Importantly, these changes wrought upon teaching and learning and those who enact them are not the permanent result of a single choice or act. On the contrary, the sanctity of these acts is made conditional on mankind's perpetual involvement and participation in them in sacred ways and with consecratory intent. In other words, in order for teaching and learning to be sacred, it is believed that they must be eternal—realized throughout the course of one's lifetime and into the eternities thereafter, as well. The change wrought by education's sanctification manifests itself in six primary ways. The first three apply to the teaching and learning process, and include a change in methods, environment and the pedagogic encounter. The second three apply to the sanctifying change

[1] Harvey, *Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei.*

[2] see, for example, *Shab.* 133b, "Just as He is compassionate and merciful, so too should you be compassionate and merciful."

[3] see Alexander, *God as Teacher: Jewish Reflections on a Theology of Pedagogy.*

wrought upon teachers and learners themselves, and include a change in one's understanding, educative capacity and ontology. The following sections detail these consecratory changes.

## *Sacred Methods*

While the teaching and learning methods used in this context may not all be unique to the Jewish tradition, to those who realize them in scripturally-prescribed ways, they undergo a sanctifying change. For instance, the method of speaking aloud to teach or study becomes more than common audible speech, but transforms, instead, into a sacred act of co-creation with God. This pedagogic method imitates both how God taught Moses at Sinai[1] and, even more fundamentally, how he separated light from darkness in the Jewish creation narrative.[2] As such, by the power of speech, mankind can call written Torah into being, sustain the sacred tradition of Oral Torah, and bring stories (together with their lessons and characters) to life. Just like physical speech, dancing, singing, even rocking back and forth while reading are believed to leave behind their former, ordinary functionality. They become, instead, not just physical ritualism, but the purposive involvement of the whole Jewish soul (i.e., spirit and body) in the educative act. These sanctified capacities, again, are not seen as gradational improvements wrought upon a pre-existing process, made for the sake of increased efficiency or efficacy. More than this, sanctification is believed to work a fundamental change on these methods to become processes entirely their own. In turn, those who use these sacred methods in a sacred way are enabled in the midst of their very realization to bring about a state of becoming that unsanctified teaching and learning simply cannot: they enable mankind to commune with and become like God.

## *Sacred Environment*

When teaching and learning are treated in sacred ways, the time and space in which these acts are realized are sanctified. This sanctification brings about spatial and temporal changes to one's educative environment. From this perspective, what was once a present moment like any other can become a point of intersection where time and eternity meet.[3] Importantly, this change can only be brought to pass when man and God teach and learn in tandem. "To men alone," says Heschel, "time is elusive; to men with God time is eternity in disguise."[4] When man enters such eternal, sanctified time in which God is believed to be immanently present, he receives the capacity to commune with Him in a way that is not possible under any other temporal circumstances. Again, this is not a change in the degree or intensity of ordinary time, but represents a fundamental change to the experiential fabric of time itself. Temporally speaking, then, sanctified teaching and learning is believed to change the finite to the infinite and bring the eternal into the immediacy of one's present, lived experience.[5] Once within this eternal dimension, the primordial pedagogic moment when God taught Moses at Sinai is experienced anew. The potency, sanctity and intimate connection to God of that primordial pedagogic moment are made just as efficacious at present as if experienced firsthand and in the primary instance.

Seen as eternal processes that never end, teaching and learning do not have a finite, measurable outcome at some point along a fixed timeline. Because teaching and learning are

---

[1] see Exodus 33:11
[2] see Genesis 1:3
[3] Rothschild, *Between God and Man*, 214-218.
[4] see Heschel, *The Sabbath,* 101.
[5] Yanchar, *Participational Agency.*

believed to be eternal, their purposes are seen as similarly eternal, and so have no end. With this understanding, coupled with Heschel's idea that time is sanctified by one's active participation in it, teaching and learning are not something one can finish. Rather, they are a lived, experiential process that one must commit to eternally. Like the story of Rabbi Akiva's fish, sacred teaching and learning is not a matter of jumping into the water, swimming for a time, then leaving. Being both infinite in scope and endless in duration, the sanctified educative process is, instead, seen as a transformation. The moment one dives into the water, one becomes a fish, so to speak, to participate forever in the sacred act of teaching and learning as intently and endlessly as a fish might swim through water. Finally, like the chair of the rabbis at *Osher Shlomo,* wherever one teaches or learns in sacred ways, that place is made sacred—not by any virtue inherent in the place, but by the residual sanctity of the temporal act realized within it. In all these ways, sanctified teaching and learning brings sanctity into the immediacy of lived experience. In the midst of these sacred acts, a moment becomes eternity, and space a temple. From this point of view, teaching and learning themselves become an endless temple in time and space, built as a living, yet never-ending encounter with heaven.

## *Sacred Encounter*

The sanctification of teaching and learning is also believed to change the nature of the pedagogic encounter itself. Whereas what Widder called the "universal concept of teaching"[1] describes a pedagogic encounter as a moment shared between a teacher and a learner, a sanctified pedagogic moment is shared not by two present parties, but three. God is believed not only to be present in such an encounter,[2] but to participate as an actively-involved third party. The help that God provides in such encounters is not theoretical or abstract, but present, active and practical. In other words, God's perceived involvement in the pedagogic process is efficacious. It is believed to make a discernible difference both to the dispositions of those who teach and learn, as well as to the efficacy of the methods they employ in accomplishing the purposes of Judaic education, namely, to help mankind become like God. In this role as an eternally-present help in the pedagogic encounter, God not only specifically aids in the process of learning (by learning alongside students "always and everywhere"[3]) but, seen as the archetypal, eternal teacher,[4] helps those who teach, as well. By Divine pedagogic influence, God's presence works a discernible difference both on the process itself as well as those who realize it. As Rav Gadi explained, under such conditions, God can make more of one's teaching than one would have otherwise been able to do on one's own. Simply stated, God "leads those who work hard in studying Torah,"[5] thereby making a discernible difference to that process. This difference, again, is not necessarily reflected in learning outcomes in the contemporary sense. It is believed to come about, instead, in the quality and sanctity of the process itself, as well as its capacity to realize the purpose behind it, that is, that man might become like God through perpetual involvement therein.

[1] Widder, *To Teach in Ancient Israel,* 15.
[2] *Pirkei Avot* 3:2
[3] Rawidowicz, *Israel: The Ever-Dying People and Other Essays*, 135-136.
[4] Alexander, *God as Teacher: Jewish Reflections on a Theology of Pedagogy*, 5.
[5] *Taidkat HaTzaddik,* 226.

## *Sacred Understanding*

While intentionally teaching and learning in a sacred way, one's capacity to understand undergoes a qualitative change. That which was once entirely beyond ordinary human comprehension is believed to become immanently apparent to one's understanding. According to one *Chassidic* tale, when left unsanctified, teaching and learning only work on the surface of one's heart. Intentionally-sanctified educative acts, on the other hand, open the heart, allowing God's teachings to sink deeply into it.[1] This "deep internalization of the topic being studied" is understood as "a sense of truth" that rings true to and even awakens the spark of Divine potential within the human soul.[2] Such sacred teaching, or "Torah of the heart,"[3] is not only able to be "absorbed"[4] into a sanctified, open heart, but is believed to spring forth from the heart, as well. In this heart to heart exchange, reminiscent of the Buberian "I-Thou" relationship,[5] "the heart is the loom," wrote Palmer, "on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies, and the fabric is stretched tight." In other words, when sanctified teaching and learning can come and go freely from open heart to open heart, "teacher and students and subject can be woven into the fabric of community that learning, and living, require."[6]

By experiencing such sacred teaching, what was once unintelligible is believed to become clear. While this sacred dimension of teaching and learning can be discussed in propositional ways (as in the present case), just as Otto[7] and James[8] explained, it is believed to be entirely unknowable unless enacted firsthand on an intimate, experiential level. Importantly, though this type of understanding is unique to those who enact teaching and learning in a sacred way, its application is not limited to Torah study, or even religious education alone. On the contrary, from these Jewish perspectives, teaching and learning can be sacred in any subject area, so long as (in the Jewish context) it fits within the parameters of what God is believed to have deemed worthy of such study. In sum, the change that comes upon one's understanding through the sanctification of teaching and learning is not a matter of degree or quality. It is a change in its very nature—a transformation from that which was previously paradoxical into sanctified, experiential clarity.

## *Sacred Educative Capacity*

In this tradition, it is believed that educative methods have been passed down person to person, extending from the present day back to Moses, who received them from God Himself. As such, when one teaches and learns in ways believed to be appointed by God, one is not merely imitating the pedagogic methods of one's predecessors. Instead, one who teaches in a sacred way in this context is believed to be imitating God's way of teaching and learning. This specifically educative dimension of *imitatio dei* is seen to endow teachers and learners with a capacity to teach and learn that draws upon the divine power by which God Himself does so each day. With regard to learning, one's capacity to understand is, again, not

---

[1] Maurice Friedman, *Dialogue with Hasidic Tales: Hallowing the Everyday* (New York: Insight Books, 1988), 77.
[2] Shore, *Torah from the Heart: Chassidic Insights into Spiritual Education,* 210.
[3] ibid., 209.
[4] *Divrei Sofrim 15*
[5] see Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1958).
[6] Parker Palmer, "The Heart of a Teacher" in *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 11.
[7] see Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*.
[8] see William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

simply improved, but fundamentally changed—enabled to comprehend that which was previously unapproachable by means of the human intellect alone. In like manner, one's capacity to teach does not increase in quality, but fundamentally changes as it draws ever closer in its sanctifying connection to God and his teaching methods.

Jewish scripture outlines the nature of this fundamental change when one ascends from the unaided pedagogic methods of man to what are seen as the celestial educative ways of heaven. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts," God is recorded to have said in Jewish scripture, "neither are your ways my ways…For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."[1] From this perspective, God's ways of teaching and learning are not improvements made upon the plane of human pedagogy, but are instead comprised of a qualitatively different capacity to teach and learn. This capacity, again, is as propositionally inexplicable as the taste of salt or how to ride a bicycle. It is, in short, experientially discernible, while its quality is believed to remain unknown to those who do not try the experiment, as it were, to respond to the invitation to teach and learn in a sacred way. Importantly, this change does not necessarily result in increased efficiency or speed in the educative process. Because teaching and learning are seen to be eternal endeavors, this change has little to do with accomplishing educative outcomes. Instead, it represents a broadening and a deepening of one's involvement in and communion with the mind and understanding of God, which is an inherent, though dormant part of teaching and learning both sacred texts as well as appropriate subject matter elsewhere.

## *Sacred Ontology*

More fundamental than the change brought about to sanctified teaching and learning, however, is the change wrought in sanctified teachers and learners themselves. Responding to what is believed to be God's call to teach and learn, and to treat such teaching and learning as a sacred activity, man becomes a co-sanctifier of the educative process with God. By virtue of this perceived partnership with Him, man is raised from the present, mundane moment into the eternal realm, to commune with God even as he imitates His actions. In this sense, sanctified teaching and learning are seen as an eternally-present apprenticeship with God. Working one-on-one with Him to both teach and learn in His way, man learns firsthand from God the attributes, methods and dispositions embodied in Him as the perfect Teacher. Then, by consistently acting like God, being a teacher and learner as God is *the* Teacher and Learner, bathed in the light of God's approval, man moves beyond simply having the capacity to act like God. He begins, instead, to become like the very God he imitates.

It is in the midst of this very act—not in its completion, but in the process of its realization—that man is believed to undergo a fundamental transformation. He changes from what the Talmud describes as one who holds a lamp to light the way, to one from whom the light of God can illuminate others.[2] In this sense, teaching and learning in a sacred way takes man as he is in his dormant, inherent state as an *imago dei* and brings him into the active, involved state of *imitatio dei* whereby that potential is actualized. It is in this very state of action, rather than inaction, that the Divine spark within man is kindled, whereby man is believed to become like His Creator. When teaching and learning are consistently realized in sacred ways, one not only develops the capacity to teach, learn and understand the world as God does, he also becomes more like Him as he takes upon himself aspects of the Divine personality as described in scripture. In short, by treating teaching and learning as a sacred

---

[1] Isaiah 55:8-9

[2] see *B. Sot* 21a.

activity, it is believed that man answers God's call to be holy, even as God is holy in one of the most powerful ways available to him.[1]

# Implications

These sacred approaches to teaching and learning have significant implications for education research more broadly-conceived. While the perspectives represented here are those of a specific faith community, their unique approaches to and perspectives on education can shed light on significant and relevant issues in contemporary education research. These implications include unique perspectives and insights about learning outcomes, teacher and learner roles, epistemology, the connection between teaching and learning and learning difficulty. While these insights have their limitations, they also open up potential avenues for new directions in future research.

## *An Alternative Perspective to Outcomes-Based Learning*

Carefully-enumerated learning outcomes are now a standard across higher education today.[2] However, these can run the risk of becoming so fixated upon education's culminating ends that they lose focus on the importance of the processes by which those ends are realized.[3] This is especially relevant in light of contemporary educational research on the importance of lifelong learning.[4] Considering lifelong learning's emphasis on education as a continuing process, rather than a series of summative ends, education research could benefit from an alternative perspective. The sacred approach to Judaic teaching and learning outlined here offers one such alternate approach. Those at *Merkaz David, Or Akiva* and *Osher Shlomo* view sacred teaching and learning as an eternal process. As an activity without an end, no end is used to define the educative process in this context. As such, teaching and learning here focus more on perpetual participation, repetition, reiteration, renewal and reenactment than measurable endings or outcomes. While content remains important, like lifelong learning, this interpretation of education's aims emphasizes learning how to learn, that such education might continue perpetually. This is where Jewish education's perspective on the eternal nature of teaching and learning can make a contribution. Rather than focus uniquely on outcomes, this perspective sheds new light on the purposive importance of the process itself. This perspective, namely, that perpetual participation in education's process is a significant locus of education's value, offers a rich and dynamic alternative to outcomes-based learning.

## *Living Remembrance: A Practical Epistemology*

According to those at *Merkaz David, Or Akiva* and *Osher Shlomo,* part of what makes teaching and learning eternal is that knowledge itself must be continually renewed through an endless, experiential process of living remembrance. In this frame, living remembrance describes a process of consistent, active remembering—not by cognitive recall, but through lived, participatory reenactment, regularly repeated over the span of one's lifetime and into

[1] Leviticus 19:2
[2] George D. Kuh, Natasha Jankowski, Stanley Oliver Ikenberry, and Jillian L. Kinzie. *Knowing what Students Know and Can Do: The Current State of Student Learning Outcomes Assessment in US Colleges and Universities*. (Urbana, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2014).
[3] see Calvert, *Investigating the One-on-one, Master-Apprentice Relationship.*
[4] Colin Griffin, John Holford, and Peter Jarvis, ed. Colin Griffin, John Holford, and Peter Jarvis, *International Perspectives on Lifelong Learning* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

the eternities thereafter. This sacred approach to teaching and learning has significant implications for educative philosophy and practice. It does so by building upon Sfard's participation metaphor of learning,[1] depicting it not as a single act, but as perpetual participation in an act that must be consistently, even endlessly renewed.

This, in turn, builds upon Polanyi's concept of personal knowledge. Seeing knowledge as that which is consistently reenacted, such knowledge is constantly in danger of being lost from one generation to the next[2] if not passed on through such lived enactment. More crucially in this context, if one who embodies such personal knowledge fails to consistently reenact it throughout his own life, it can be lost within a single lifetime, far sooner than from one generation to another. This portrays the act of repetition in teaching and learning not as a contingency plan only to be used when knowledge is forgotten, but as an essential part of what it means to know something in the first place. In other words, from this sacred approach to education, one who repeats what he has learnt does not do so because he does not know it, or has forgotten it. He does so because that is precisely what knowing something means. In an educative context rooted in the efficiency of attaining learning outcomes, repetition can be seen in a negative light as it can represent inefficiency. However, when seen as part of a lifelong (if not eternal) endeavor, repetition is not negative, but an essential part of maintaining and renewing the living tradition of both personal knowledge in learning as well interpersonal knowledge in teaching. Applying this sacred approach to teaching and learning in other contexts could shed new light on the purpose and value of repetition, reenactment and renewal in the educative process.

## *Awakening to an Awareness of the Dormant Inherent*

The dormant-inherent concept of sanctity not only applies to the power of the educative act itself, but of the dormant inherent value and capacity of every individual who teaches and learns, as well. From this perspective, teaching and learning are not sacred on a theoretical plane, but as lived actions, embodied and personified by teachers and learners. In other words, the educative process only realizes its dormant, inherent potential when learning becomes a learner and teaching becomes a teacher. From this perspective, then, the inherent value of teaching and learning lies with its enactors, rather than the methodological or philosophical premises upon which their approaches to education may be based. This highlights and reinforces a humanistic approach to the educative process, as it places the locus of the value of teaching and learning in human agents.

Like the wheat and flax that changed into bread and cloth, education in this setting is the process whereby a person realizes his inherent, though theretofore dormant potential. This sheds light on the role of a teacher. In this context, a teacher bears the responsibility of seeing the dormant, inherent potential within each student, awakening the student to an awareness of that potential, then bringing it forth in the interdependent processes of teaching and learning. From this perspective, neither a learner nor a teacher alone can realize this potential in its fullness. In other words, teachers and learners in this context not only need one another to fulfill their potential, but can accomplish more together than they would otherwise be able to achieve on their own. This has implications for research on the interdependence of the roles and relationships between teachers and learners.[3]

---

[1] Sfard, *On Two Metaphors for Learning and the Dangers of Choosing Just One*, 4-13.

[2] Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 53.

[3] see Melissa Noel Hawkley, "Roles and Relationships in Learning and Teaching: A Case Study of the Development and Worldwide Implementation of a New Religious Curriculum" (doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 2014).

## *A Purposive Connection Between Teaching and Learning*

While emphasizing learning over teaching has brought significant insights to pedagogy in recent decades, it can run the risk of portraying the educative endeavor as an auto-centric process, focused uniquely on the learner above all else as its end goal. Those at *Merkaz David, Or Akiva* and *Osher Shlomo* offer an alternative perspective. In Jewish scripture, teaching is often portrayed as the primary commandment, while learning, on the other hand, is seen as preparatory to teaching another. This is among the most fundamental elements of the educative process in this tradition. Teaching and learning from this point of view is about building capacity for what is scripturally-depicted as a higher endeavor, namely, giving over that which one has received to another. This makes both teaching and learning fundamentally selfless acts. Education's telos in this context, then, is not learning for oneself, but learning so as to then be able to teach another. While this perspective still allows "for a teacher to also be a learner and a learner to be a teacher," it does so "without forfeiting individual unique roles,"[1] nor the primacy of teaching as the principal purpose of the educative endeavor generally. This builds upon Gong's conceptualization of learning as a "three-person problem,"[2] emphasizing teaching another as learning's purpose, rather than learning as the end goal of the educative process. In this responsibility, "a teacher's role is never abdicated,"[3] nor a "student's obligation"[4] to pursue that same selfless, didactic purpose ever set aside.

## *Purposive Difficulty*

Significant threads of education research discuss how to make learning easier for the student. While this facilitative orientation continues to be valuable to education research and practice, the perspectives of these Jewish communities suggest that difficulty and struggle can also make a unique contribution to the educative process. These communities describe the value of difficulty in learning as sanctifying, intended to purify and prepare students to draw closer to and eventually become like God. A more general perspective, however, not specific to any one faith tradition might describe this value as capacity-building, strengthening and refining. While making learning easier for students is of significant benefit to their education, allowing for the capacity-building struggle characteristic of what these communities see as learning's inherent difficulty may bring a different, equally unique value to learning, as well. This is not to say that teachers should ever seek to intentionally make learning more difficult for their students. The yeshivas in this study never advocated such an approach themselves. However, it does suggest that there may be appropriate times in which it could be beneficial for a teacher to allow a student, under the proper circumstances, to work through the struggle of learning themselves. This could be especially valuable when asking students to try something that is just beyond their reach, such as a new math problem or encountering a new phrase in a foreign language. Rather than jump immediately to their aid in such situations, these communities suggest that there may be inherent value to allowing them to struggle through such encounters for a time. Part of the value of the struggle of

[1] Hawkley, *Roles and Relationships in Learning and Teaching: A Case Study of the Development and Worldwide Implementation of a New Religious Curriculum*, 62.
[2] Susan Peterson Gong, *Learning & Teaching for Exponential Growth: A Three Person Problem* (Provo, UT: BYU Printing, 2002).
[3] Hawkley, *Roles and Relationships in Learning and Teaching: A Case Study of the Development and Worldwide Implementation of a New Religious Curriculum*, 73.
[4] Shapira, *The Student's Obligation.*

learning may, in short, simply be gaining the capacity to learn how to learn, and to be unafraid to do so in new, unfamiliar contexts.

## Limitations

As a non-Jew, my presence was limited to those Orthodox Jewish learning communities that would allow non-Jews into their precincts. While many were amenable to such research being conducted in their midst, there were still many more *yeshiva* communities, especially among the ultra-Orthodox communities of Jerusalem, who were not open to my studying among them. Furthermore, time only allowed for the investigation to cover three *yeshivas,* and while these three communities represented three different traditions, they only touched upon a very small portion of religious Jewish education in Jerusalem, let alone the world. Because I am male and was only allowed to enter all-male learning communities, this study is also significantly limited by its lack of women's perspectives on sacred education. This study also focused on a specific location in contemporary Jerusalem. As such, it cannot speak for all of world Jewry, and so is not generalizable in this way. Lastly, this study only considered contemporary perspectives, and did not illustrate the historical development of Jewish educational practices or ideas about the sacred over time. Filling these gaps could provide rich opportunities for future research.

## Directions for Future Research

As a new way of approaching the relationship between education and the sacred through the lens of practice, this thesis creates a space for rich and dynamic future research along this vein. To do so, researchers might conduct similar ethnographic studies among other religious communities. Such studies could engage with indigenous literature on the role of the sacred in educative practice while observing the realization of those ideas *in situ* through ethnographic participant observation. Such studies could then lead to cross-comparative research between various approaches to the sacred in education, contributing to increased interfaith dialogue and further multicultural literacy. Researchers in other fields could also investigate the role of the sacred in education in non-religious communities and settings, using a variety of methods apart from ethnography. Such research could contribute to what has been called the contemporary renaissance[1] of research on the sacred in recent years.

## Summary

Somewhere between reading Dov's dusty books, walking Rav Levi's secret passage and dancing Rav Weisman's raucous *farbrengen,* the elusive nature of Judaic holiness emerged, and it became clear that teaching and learning weren't just related to the holy: to them, teaching and learning *were* holy. And with that subtle change, the question changed, as well. Seeing sanctity as the dormant inherent, that teaching and learning were sacred meant that they were believed to be an invitation from God to man to act—that he teach and learn in a sacred way. Looking to God as an exemplar, those who approach teaching and learning in this way believe that they are responding to His call by imitating His ways—teaching, learning and living as He does. When they do this, God is believed to respond in kind,

[1] Dahl, *In Between: The Holy Beyond Modern Dichotomies*; note also the dedication of August 2017's issue of *Religion* to "the sacred"

actively participating in the educative process Himself, dynamically teaching and learning with those who do the same. When so sanctified by the cooperative involvement of both God and man, teaching and learning not only to improve, but undergo a vital change. They become a *sui generis* practice whereby mankind not only attains the capacity to teach, learn and see the world as God does, but to become like Him. Simply stated, from the Judaic perspectives of these communities, teaching and learning are a dynamic, living, sacred activity.

# EPILOGUE

Menahem was one of the poorest men in the town. He and his wife had seven children, and work as hard or as long as he might, his job as a humble cobbler never seemed quite enough to support his family. Yet, despite his bleak circumstances, whether in a crust of bread for the hungry or a coin or two for the penniless, he always made time for those in need. By this same kindhearted warmth and generosity, his wife and children might have been the happiest family in their little village, had it not been for the specter of hunger, want and poverty that ever loomed over their ramshackle little home.

But more than the strangers he freely helped or even the family he selflessly loved, Menahem was devoted to God with a steadfastness unlike any other in the village. But even though he began each day at the synagogue in prayer, even leaving precious moments at the cobbler's bench to pray throughout the day, the indigent circumstances of Menahem's life that forced him to work every day since childhood had never left him any time to learn how to read. And so, whenever he went to pray or listen to the Rabbi's lessons, the students at the synagogue would laugh him to scorn.

"Here he comes," they would call out loud, not even trying to hide their derisive laughter. "Do you think he understands any more today than he did yesterday?" And though Menahem tried his best to ignore their taunts and jeers, day after day it weighed more heavily upon a heart already heavy with the burden of a large family in need, and he soon began to despair. One day, sitting as he always did to hear the Rabbi's evening lesson on Torah, Menahem heard him read a famous saying from the ancient Rav Hillel, "An ignorant man cannot be a God-fearing man." Immediately, he burst into tears from the back row where he sat. "It's me!" he cried. "I am the ignorant man. Hillel was talking about me!"

Instead of laughter, the students all fell silent. For once, they began to feel pity for the old man. "What a shame," they said to one another, "to love Torah so deeply and not understand a single word of it." But as Menahem walked slowly home that evening, dragging his feet as the echoes of Hillel's condemnation rang in his ears, he was stopped when someone laid a hand on his shoulder. It was the rabbi. "Why are you so sad?" he asked. "Please, rabbi," he pled, "do not make matters worse. I understand now that I cannot possibly commune with God, for I neither study Torah myself nor teach it to my children. All is lost," he said almost to himself, then began walking homeward once again.

"Please, Menahem," pled the Rav in his turn. "There is something else you can do to gain the favor of God." "I beg you, dear Rav," said the wretched man in reply, "do not mock me. I am sad enough as it is."

"No, you misunderstand me," said the Rav, more earnestly this time. "The synagogue needs a new Torah scroll. If you have one written, your reward will be great indeed—the same as if you had been teaching and learning Torah from your youth."

The miserable frown on the cobbler's face melted away in an instant and, rejoicing, he promised he would begin immediately, even before going home at the end of such a long and harrowing day. But as he headed into the village to begin, he realized that it was no small thing to procure a Torah scroll. Thoughts began rushing through his mind. He would have to find kosher parchment on which to write, then a scribe who wrote well enough to write the entire scroll, which itself would take more than a year. A thousand other tasks began to race through his mind until a single question fell upon his heart like a millstone: how was he going to pay for all of this?

When he came home (much later than usual after the eventful evening), all seven of his children seemed fast asleep as he told his wife all about the Torah scroll. "Don't worry," she said after hearing her husband's story. "I can find some work around the village. Our neighbor even mentioned she might need a little extra help around the house."

"Me too, father," said his oldest son, who, it turns out, hadn't been sleeping at all. "The village school needs another watchman, and I can do that after school."

"I heard that the tailor's eyes are going bad," said another of his children, a daughter, who had also been feigning sleep. "I can thread his needles for him, and maybe even sew a straight seam when he needs it."

And so it was that Menahem and his family went to work, all pitching in what little time and means they had to spare in saving money for the scroll. After several months, they had saved enough to procure the parchment they would need. When he had slaughtered the lambs without blemish, he gave the meat to the synagogue, and the skins he cleaned and cured to be written upon. After months more hard labor by everyone in the family, Menahem took a great sum to a worthy, God-fearing Torah scribe and with the quills and special ink Menahem had procured, he began to write, letter by letter, hour by hour, fulfilling his sacred task.

After seven long years, stopping whenever Menahem ran out of money, and beginning again when the family had saved enough to continue, the work was finished, and the scroll was ready to be adorned for the synagogue. In the months and years that followed, Menahem sought out the best weavers for its gold-embroidered mantle, and the finest silversmiths for its fitting crown.

Finally, the day came when every last detail of the scroll was finished. And though some of Menahem's children were grown, married and had children of their own, the whole family came to the synagogue, along with what seemed like the whole village, to see it placed at the head of the assembly. The villagers kept streaming in through the front door, some playing instruments and singing, rejoicing as they went at the chance to see Menahem's famous scroll that had taken so long and cost so much to make. As they entered, they formed a circle and began to sing and dance around Menahem, who stood in the middle, hugging the Torah scroll, his eyes raised heavenward. Clapping, stamping, they all kept time with the music, overcome with a joy that filled all their hearts.

In the midst of the singing, dancing and clapping, Menahem felt a breathlike touch upon his arm. Suddenly, he looked down and gave a piercing cry so loud that all the music ceased in an instant. To his and everyone else's horror, the scroll was gone—vanished right from their very midst. Realizing what had happened, their ecstasy turned to mourning as they wept at having lost something so precious to their hearts. And none wept more bitterly than Menachem, for he cried, rooted to the spot where he had last held the scroll, until everyone else had gone.

That night, when his grief and despair had finally given way to a restless sleep, Menahem had a dream. In the dream, an old man appeared to him. "Do not grieve, my son," he said. "It was not your sin that caused the scroll to disappear, but your sanctity. It was God Himself who took it from you. For the years of sacrifice you and your family gave so freely were etched into every letter of every page. He did not want it to remain a moment longer outside of Heaven, for your Torah scroll, Menahem, is not only acceptable to Him, but holy in the eyes of God." The next morning, as Menahem opened the door on his way to pray at the synagogue, he found the rabbi waiting for him at his threshold, for he, too, had had the very same dream. Despite not knowing the meaning of a single word of Torah, Menahem's educative act had been blessed of Heaven, and his Torah—his Teaching—made sacred.[1]

For Menahem, as for all the Jewish people, the answer to what sanctified his teaching and learning lay not in any dogmatic method, imbued with an inherent capacity to magically change ordinary pedagogic processes into sacred ones. No, the answer lay in how he treated

[1] Story adapted from Azriel Eisenberg and Leah Ain Globe, "The Sefer Torah" in *The Secret Weapon and Other Stories of Faith and Valor* (New York: The Soncino Press, 1966), 19-23.

teaching and learning as a sacred act—in who he was, how he acted and what he sacrificed in the process of its fulfilment. And just as there was no outcome to speak of after Menahem's seven years of sacrifice and struggle, the sanctity of Judaic teaching and learning lay not in any outcome, imagined or otherwise, but, instead, in who one became in the process. And so it is now. For after three long years of sacrifice and struggle, like Menahem, should this thesis disappear from my grasp in the very hour of its completion, the sanctity of my own process lay not in these words, but in the process of their writing. And so I say with the ancient Rav Yohanan Ben Zakkai, "If all the heavens were parchment, and all the trees pens, and all the oceans ink, they would not suffice to write down the wisdom which I have learned from my masters, and I took away from them no more than a fly takes from the sea when it bathes."[1]

[1] *B. Suk.* 28a., B.B.B. 134a., and ARN a., *loc. cit.*

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahams, Israel, Joshua Gutmann, Yehoshua M. Grintz, Marvin Fox, Gershom Scholem and Alexander Altmann. "God" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition*, 653. Edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 7. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.

Abramson, Robert. "Kedushah: One Focus in the Vision of Our Day Schools." *The Melton Journal* (1990): 31-32.

Adler, Patricia and Peter Adler. *Membership Roles in Field Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1987.

Amsterdam, Anthony and Jerome Bruner. *Minding the Law*, 141. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Anttonen, Veikko "Sacred" in *Guide to the Study of Religion,* 276-277. Edited by Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon. London: Cassell, 2000.

Aron, Isa, Steven Cohen, Lawrence Hoffman, and Ari Kelman. *Sacred Strategies: Transforming Synagogues from Functional to Visionary.* Maryland: Rowman and Littefield, 2010.

Astuti, Rita. "Death, Ancestors and the Living Dead: Learning without Teaching in Madagascar" in *Children's Understanding of Death: from Biological to Religious Conceptions*, 1-18. Edited by Victoria Talwar, Paul L. Harris and Michael Schleifer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Auvinen, Tommi, Iiris Aaltio, and Kirsimarja Blomqvist. "Constructing leadership by Storytelling–the Meaning of Trust and Narratives." *Leadership & Organization Development Journal* 34, no. 6 (2013): 496-514.

Äystö, Tuomas. "The Sacred Orders of Finnish Political Discourse on the Revision of the Blasphemy Law." *Numen* 64, no. 2–3 (2017): 294–321.

Barabas, S. "Holiness," in *Zondervan International Encyclopedia of Bible* 3, 174. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervanm, 1975.

Barr, James. *The Semantics of Biblical Language*, 102. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Barrett, William. *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy*, 77. New York: Doubleday, 1958.

Baudissin, Wolf. *Studien zur semitischen Religions-geschichte,* Vol. 2., 45. Leipzig: Verlag con Fr. Wil. Grunow, 1878.

Berkovits, Eliezer. "The Concept of Holiness" in *Essential Essays on Judaism*. Edited by David Hazony, 281-284. Jerusalem: Shalem Press, 2002.

Bernard, Russel. *Research Methods in Cultural Anthropology*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1988.

Besdin, Abraham R. *Reflections of the Rav: Lessons in Jewish Thought Adapted from Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.* Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1993.

Bingham, Charles and Alexander Sidorkin. introduction to the book, *No Education Without Relation*. Edited by Charles Bingham and Alexander Sidorkin. New York: Peter Lang, 2004.

Boman, Thorleif. *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, 31. London: Westminster Press, 1960.

Borg, Marcus J. *Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power—And How They Can Be Restored*, 74. New York: Harper One, 2011.

Brereton, Joel P. "Sacred Space" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion Vol. 12*, 526-535. New York: Macmillan, 1987.

Bruner, Jerome. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, 12-13. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986.

Bruner, Jerome. "Life as Narrative." *Social Research* 54, no. 1 (1987): 11-32.

Bruner, Jerome. "What is a Narrative Fact?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 560 (1998): 17-27.

Buber, Martin. *I and Thou.* translated by R. Smith, New York: Scribner and Sons, 1958.

Buber, Martin. "Conversion." In the *Tales of the Hasidim*, 200. New York: Schocken, 2013.

Büchner, V.F. "Yazdān," In *Encyclopedia of Islam*, First Edition. Boston: E.J. Brill, 1913-1936.

Buxbaum, Yitzhak. "Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism," *Hasidicstories.com*, http://www.hasidicstories .com/Articles/Hasidic_Theories/spirit.html.

Buxbaum, Yitzhak. Storytelling and Spirituality in Judaism, xv. Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson Inc., 1994.

Callois, Roger. *Man and the Sacred*, 22. Translated by Meyer Barash. New York: Free Press, 1959.

Carrasco, David. "Sacrifice" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*. Edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 12. Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 2005.

Case, Jennifer M. "Emergent Interactions: Rethinking the Relationship between Teaching and Learning." *Teaching in Higher Education* 20, no. 6 (2015).

Chighel, Michael. "What is 'holiness?'" Chabad.org, http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media _cdo/aid/676159/jewish/What-Is-Holiness.htm

Childs, Brevard. *Memory and Tradition in Israel*. London: SCM Press, 1962.

Cohen, Hermann. *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*. Translated by Simon Kaplan, 96. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Cohen, Herman. *Die Religion der Vernunft aus den Quellen des Judentums*, 116-130. Germany: Marix Verlag, 1929.

Colpe, Carsten. "The Sacred and the Profane" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*. Edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 12: 7964–7978. Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, [1987] 2005.

Cover, Robert M. "The Supreme Court, 1982 Term—Foreword: Nomos and Narrative." *Yale Faculty Scholarship Series*, 1983: 2705.

Coy, Michael William. *Apprenticeship from Theory to Practice and Back Again.* Edited by Michael William Coy. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989.

Culianu, Ion Petru and Craig A. Burgdoff. "Sacrilege" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*. Edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 12, 8010. Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 2005.

Dahl, Espen. *In Between: The Holy Beyond Modern Dichotomies*. Translated by Brian McNeil. Oslo: Vandenhoek and Ruprecht, 2008.

Darling, Ann. "The Lecture and the Learning Paradigm," *Communication Education* 66, no. 2 (2017): 253-255.

Davidson, Andrew Bruce. *The Theology of the Old Testament*, 257. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1904.

Davey, Nicholas. *Unquiet Understanding: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*, 7. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2006.

Dawes, Gregory W. "The Sacred, the Occult and the Distinctiveness of Religion." *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 46, no. 1 (2017): 19–36.

Decock, Paul B. "Philo of Alexandria: Holiness as Self-Possession and Self-Transcendence." HTS *Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72, no. 4 (2016): 6.

Demerath, Nicolas Jay III. "The Varieties of Sacred Experience: Finding the Sacred in a Secular Grove." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* 39, no. 1 (2000): 3.

Dennis, Geoffrey W. "Kelipot" in *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Myth, Magic, and Mysticism*, 367. Woodbury, Minnesota: Llewellyn Publications, 2016.

de Vidas, Elijah. *Keter Malkhut XXIX*, 49. Translated by Bernard Lewis. London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1961.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, 63. New York: Routledge, 1966.

Durkheim, Émile. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, 36. New York: Free Press, 1965.

Durkheim, Émile. *Moral Education: A Study in the Theory and Application of the Sociology of Education*, 175. New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1961.

Eichrodt, Walther. *Theology of the Old Testament.* Vol. 1, 274. London: SCM Press, 1961.

Eisenberg, Azriel and Leah Ain Globe. "The Sefer Torah" in *The Secret Weapon and Other Stories of Faith and Valor*, 19-23. New York: The Soncino Press, 1966.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1959.

Ellis, Carolyn and Arthur Bochner. "Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject" in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Edited by Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 733-768. London: Sage Publications, 2000.

Engler, Steven and Mark G. Gardiner. "Semantics and the sacred." *Religion,* 47, no. 4 (2017): 617-620.

Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Ferris, Timothy. The Whole Shebang: A State of the Universe(s) Report, 312. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Fetterman, David. *Ethnography: Step by Step*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2010.

Fishbane, Michael. *Sacred Attunement: A Jewish Theology.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Friedman, Theodore, Baruch Levine and Eliezer Schweid, "Kedushah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, 50-65. Edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 12. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.

Friedman, Theodore. "Oral Law" in Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition, 456. Edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 12. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.

Gantke, Wolfgang and Vladislav Serikov. *Das Heilige als Problem der gegenwärtigen Religionswissenschaft.* Frakfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015.

Gearon, Liam. *On Holy Ground: The Theory and Practice of Religious Education.* Oxon: Routledge, 2013.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays.* New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Gesenius, William. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Translated by Edward Robinson, 913. Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1871.

Giorgi, Amedeo and Barbro Giorgi. "The Descriptive Phenomenological Psychological Method" in *Qualitative Research in Psychology: Expanding Perspectives in Methodology and Design*. Edited by Paul Camic, Jean Rhodes and Lucy Yardley, 243-273. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2003.

Girard, René. *Violence and the Sacred*. Translated by Patrick Gregory, 31. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1972.

Given, Lisa. “Qualitative Research Methods” in *The Encyclopedia of Educational Psychology*. Edited by Neil J. Salkind, 827-831. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2008.

Glazer, Steven. “Sacredness: The Ground of Learning” in *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education*. Edited by Steven Glazer, 11-32. New York: Penguin, 1999.

Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. “West-östlicher Divan, Rendsch Nameh: Buch des Unmuts“ in *Poems of the West and the East*. Translated by John Whaley, 189. Bern and New York, 1998.

Haigh, Carol, and Pip Hardy. "Tell Me a Story—A Conceptual Exploration of Storytelling in Healthcare Education." *Nurse Education Today* 31, no. 4 (2011): 408-411.

Halford, Joan Montgomery. “Longing for the Sacred in Schools: A Conversation with Nel Noddings.” *Educational Leadership* 56, no. 4 (December 1998/Jan 1999): 28-32.

Hänel, D.J. *Die Religion der Heiligkeit*, 44. Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1931.

Harrington, Hannah. *Holiness: Rabbinic Judaism and the Graeco-Roman World*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Haroutunian-Gordon, Sophie. *Learning to Teach Through Discussion: The Art of Turning the Soul*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009.

Harvey, Warren Zev. “Holiness: A Command to Imitatio Dei.” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Thought* 16, no. 3 (1977).

Hashkes, Hannah. “God in Rabbinic Tradition: Human Reasoning and Divine Authority.” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 44, no. 2 (2013): 270.

Hauselmann, Martin and CarmenTanner. “Taboos and Conflicts in Decision-Making: Sacred Values, Decision Difficulty and Emotions.” *Judgment and Decision Making* 3, no. 1 (2008): 51-63.

Hawkley, Melissa Noel. “Roles and Relationships in Learning and Teaching: A Case Study of the Development and Worldwide Implementation of a New Religious Curriculum” Doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 2014.

Heinämäki, Elisa. “Durkheim, Bataille, and Girard on the Ambiguity of the Sacred: Reconsidering Saints and Demoniacs.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 83, no. 2 (2015): 523.

Hervieu-Léger, Daniele. *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, 106. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000.

Heschel, Abraham. “The Meaning of Observance,” in *Understanding Jewish Theology: Classical Issues and Modern Perspectives*. Edited by Jacob Neusner. New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1973.

Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951.

Hess, Carol Lakey. "Educating in the Spirit." *Religious Education* 86, no. 3 (1991): 383-398.

Hodge, Felicia Schanche, Anna Pasqua, Carol A. Marquez, and Betty Geishirt-Cantrell. "Utilizing Traditional Storytelling to Promote Wellness in American Indian Communities." *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 13, no. 1 (2002): 6-11.

Holtz, Barry. “Introduction: On Reading Jewish Texts” in *Back to the Sources: Reading the Classic Jewish Texts*. Edited by Barry Holtz, 24. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1984.

Husik, Isaac. *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy,* xlv-xlvii. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940.

Ibn Ezra, Abraham. *Commentary on the Pentateuch: Deuteronomy (Devarim)*. New York: Menorah Publishing Company, 2001.

Jacobs, Louis. “Holiness According to Jewish Tradition.” *Service International de Documentation Judeo-Chretienne*, 30, no. 7 (1997): 18-21.

Jacobs, Louis. "The Doctrine of the 'Divine Spark' in *Man in Jewish Sources*" in *Studies in Rationalism, Judaism and Universalism*. Edited by Raphael Loewe. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.

Jacobs, Louis. *Religion and the Individual: A Jewish Perspective*, 46. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

James, William. The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1902.

James, William. *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking*. New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1907.

Jastrow, Marcus. *Dictionary of Targumim, Talmud and Midrashic Literature*. London: Luzac, 1926.

Jenson, Philip Peter. "Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World" in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement*, 106. Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992.

La Jevic, Lisa and Stephanie Springgay, "A/r/tography as an ethics of embodiment: Visual journals in preservice education." *Qualitative inquiry* 14, no. 1 (2008): 67-89.

Jorgensen, D. *Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1989.

Kadushin, Max. *The Rabbinic Mind*, 213. New York: Bloch Publishing, 1972.

Kahn, R. "Kodesh, Mishpat and Chessed: A Philological Approach to Some Attributes of God." *Religion in Life,* 52 (1955-1956): 575.

Kamper, Dietmar and Christoph Wulf, *Das Heilige. Seine Spur in der Moderne*. Edited by Dietmar Kamper and Christoph Wulf. Bodenheim: Athenäum, 1987.

Kaplan, Lawrence. "`I Sleep, but My Heart Waketh: Maimonides' Conception of Human Perfection," in *The Thought of Moses Maimonides*. Edited by Ira Robinson, Lawrence Kaplan and Julien Bauer, 137-145. Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 1990.

Kant, Immanuel. *Lectures on the Philosophical Doctrine of Religion*. Edited and translated by Allen W. Wood, 335-452. Yale University, Connecticut: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Kauffman, Stuart. A. *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science, Reason, and Religion*. New York: Basic Books, 2008.

Kent, Orit. "A Theory of Havruta Learning." *Journal of Jewish Education* 76, no. 3, (2010): 1.

Kissileff, Beth. "Judaism: The World's Best Memory Palace." *Moment Magazine*, September/October (2012): 26.

Kittel, Rudolph "The Holiness of God," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge: Embracing Biblical, Historical, Doctrinal, and Practical Theology and Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Biography from the Earliest Times to the Present Day*. Edited by Johann J. Herzog, Philip Schaff, Albert Hauck, Samuel Macauley Jackson, Charles Colebrook Sherman, and George William Gilmore et al., 316-317. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908.

Knott, Kim. "The Secular Sacred: In between or Both/And?" in *Social Identities between the Sacred and the Secular*. Edited by Abby Day, Giselle Vincett and Christopher R. Cotter, 145-160. Farnham: Ashgate, 2013.

Knott, Kim. *The Location of Religion: A Spatial Analysis*, 87. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005.

Kofman, Irena. "The History of the Russian Piano School: Individuals and Traditions." Doctoral dissertation, University of Miami, 2001.

Kohler, Kaufmann. “Holiness” in Jewish Encyclopedia. Edited by Isidore Singer, 439-442. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906.
Kohler, Kaufmann. *Jewish Theology Systematically and Historically Considered*, 212f. New York: Macmillan, 1928.
Kook, Abraham Yitzhak. *Olat Rayah*, 282. Jerusalem: Mossad HaRav Kook, 1963.
Kraft, Siv Ellen. “The Making of a Sacred Mountain. Meanings of Nature and Sacredness in Sápmi and Northern Norway.” *Religion* 40, no. 1 (2010): 53–61.
Kripal, Jeffrey. *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*, 9. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010.
Kuh, George D., Natasha Jankowski, Stanley Oliver Ikenberry, and Jillian L. Kinzie. *Knowing what students know and can do: The current state of student learning outcomes assessment in US colleges and universities*. Urbana, IL: National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2014.
Kvale, Steiner. *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1996.
Kvale, Steinar and Svend Brinkmann. *Interviews: Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2009.
La Jevic, Lisa and Stephanie Springgay, "A/r/tography as an ethics of embodiment: Visual journals in preservice education." *Qualitative inquiry* 14, no. 1 (2008): 67-89.
Lamm, Norman. *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah’s Sake: In the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volokhin and His Contemporaries.* Hoboken, New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1989.
Lamm, Norman. *The Religious Thought of Hasidism: Text and Commentary.* New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1999.
Lane, Edward William. *An Arabic-English Lexicon.* London: Willams & Norgate, 1863.
Leibowitz, Yeshayahu. “Religious Praxis: The Meaning of *Halakha*,” in *Judaism, Human Values and the Jewish State.* Translated by Eliezer Goldman, 24. Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1992.
Leibowitz, Yeshayahu. “The Reading of Shema,” in *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*. Translated by Eliezer Goldman, 46. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.
Levi, Yehudah. *Torah Study: A Survey of Classic Sources on Timely Issues*. Translated by Raphael N. Levi, 170. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishing, 2002.
Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis, 295. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1969.
Levine, Baruch A. “The Language of Holiness: Perception of the Sacred in the Hebrew Bible,” in *Backgrounds for the Bible.* Edited by Michael Patrick O’Connor and David Noel Freedman, 243-443. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1987.
Lichtenstein, Aaron. “Joseph Soloveitchik,” in *Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century.* Edited by Simon Noveck, 293-294. Clinton, Massachusetts: B'nai B'rith Department of Adult Jewish Education,1963.
Lincoln, Yvonna and Egon Guba. *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1985.
Luzzatto, Moshe Chavim. *The Path of the Just*. Translated by Shagra Silverstein. New York: Feldheim, 1990.
Lynch, Gordon. *On the Sacred*, 32-33. London: Acumen, 2012.
Lynch, Gordon and Ruth Sheldon, “The Sociology of the Sacred: A Conversation with Jeffrey Alexander.” *Culture and Religion* 14, no. 3 (2013): 253–267.
Lynch, Patrick S.J. and Pat Mizak, “Catholic/Jesuit Values in an Introductory Religious Studies Course.” *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 15 (2012): 225–240.

Mahoney, Annette and Kenneth Pargament and Krystal Hernandez. "Heaven on Earth: Beneficial Effects of Sanctification for Individual and Interpersonal Well-being" in *Oxford Book of Happiness.* Edited by Susan David, Ilona Boniwell and Amanda Ayers, 397-410. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
Mahoney, Annette, Kenneth Pargament, Brenda Cole, Tracey Jewell, Gina Magyar, Nalini Tarakeshwar, Nicole Murray-Swank, and Russ Phillips, "A Higher Purpose: The Sanctification of Strivings in a Community Sample." *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 15 (2005): 239-262.
Mahoney, Annette, Kenneth Pargament, Tracey Jewell, Aaron Swank, Erin Scott, Erin Emery, and Mark Rye, "Marriage and the Spiritual Realm: The Role of Proximal and Distal Religious Constructs in Marital Functioning." *Journal of Family Psychology* 13 (1999): 321-338.
Maimonides*,* Moses. *The Guide for the Perplexed*. Translated by Shlomo Pines. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.
Mariña, Jacqueline. "Holiness" in *A Companion to Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Charles Taliaferro, Paul Draper, and Philip L. Quinn, 239. Hoboken, New Jersey, Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.
Marshall, Douglas A. "Temptation, Tradition, and Taboo: A Theory of Sacralization." *Sociological Theory* 28, no.1 (2010): 64-90.
Mauss, Marcel. *A General Theory of Magic*. Translated by Robert Brain. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge, [1902] 1972.
Mazumdar, Shampa and Sanjoy Mazumdar. "Sacred Space and Place Attachment." *Journal of Environmental Psychology,* 13 (1993): 231-242.
McNutt, Kathleen and Jeremy Rayner, "Is Learning Without Teaching Possible? The Productive Tension Between Network Governance and Reflexivity." *Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning* (2014).
Miller, Ron. "Introduction: Vital Voices of Educational Dissent," in *The Renewal of Meaning in Education: Responses to the Cultural and Ecological Crisis of our Times,* 8-26. Brandon, VT: Holistic Education Press, 1993.
Mills, David and Missy Morton. *Ethnography in Education.* London: Sage Publications, 2013.
Mittleman, Alan. "The Problem of Holiness." *The Journal of Analytic Theology*, Vol. 3 (2015): 36.
Molendijk, Arie L. "The Notion of the Sacred" in *Holy Ground: Reinventing Ritual Space in Modern Western Culture*. Edited by Paul Post and Arie L. Molendijk, 55-89 Leuven: Peeters, 2010.
Montefiore, Claude and Herbert Loewe. Introduction to *A Rabbinic Anthology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
Moore, George Foot. *Judaism*, 448-9. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1927.
Morgan, David. "Defining the Sacred in Fine Art and Devotional Imagery." *Religion,* 47:7 (2017): 658.
Müller, H. "קדש *qdš* holy." In Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament, Vol. 3, 1103-1118. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997.
Nagel, Louis Alan. "Teaching the Sacred: A Phenomenological Study of Synagogue-School Teachers." Doctoral dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park, 2007.
Nancy, Jean-Luc. "Notes on the Sacred." *Theory, Culture & Society.* 30, no. 5 (2013): 157.
Neusner, Jacob. *Invitation to the Talmud: A Teaching Book*. Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2003.

North, C.R, “Isaiah,” in *Interpreter’s Bible Dictionary,* 2, 733. Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1986.
O’Reilley, Mary Rose. *The Peaceable Classroom,* 72. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1993.
OED Online. "sacred, adj. and n." January 2018. Oxford University Press. http://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2355/view/Entry/169556?rskey=VFNm7f&result=2 (accessed January 19, 2018).
Osguthorpe, Richard and Matthew Sanger. “The Moral Nature of Teacher Candidate Beliefs About the Purposes of Schooling and Their Reasons for Choosing Teaching as a Career.” *Peabody Journal of Education* 88, no. 2 (2013): 180-197.
Otto, Rudolph. *The Idea of the Holy (Das Heilige).* Translated by John Harvey. London: Oxford University Press, 1923.
Oxtoby, Willard G. “The Idea of the Holy” in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*. Edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 6: 4099. Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, [1987] 2005.
Paden, William E. “Shifting Worldviews: Modeling Sacrality in Naturalistic Perspective.” *Religion,* 47:4 (2017): 705.
Palacios, Janelle. “Storytelling: A Qualitative Tool to Promote Health Among Vulnerable Populations,” *Journal of Transcultural Nursing* 26, no. 4 (2014): 346–353.
Palmer, Parker. “The Grace of Great Things: Reclaiming the Sacred in Knowing, Teaching, and Learning” in *The Heart of Learning: Spirituality in Education*. Edited by Steven Glazer, 20. New York: Penguin, 1999.
Papke, David Ray. *Narrative and the Legal Discourse: A Reader in Storytelling and the Law*. Liverpool: Deborah Charles, 1991.
Parekh, Samson C. “The Lexical and Theological Significance of the Root קדש in the Book of Isaiah.” Doctoral dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1998.
Pargament, Kenneth. *Spiritually Integrated Psychotherapy: Understanding and Addressing the Sacred*. New York: Guildford Press, 2007.
Pargament, Kenneth, Doug Oman, Julie Pomerleau, and Annette Mahoney. “Some contributions of a psychological approach to the study of the sacred.” *Religion*, 47, no. 4 (2017): 733.
Pargament, Kenneth and Annette Mahoney. “Sacred Matters: Sanctification as a Vital Topic for the Psychology of Religion.” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 15 (2005): 179-199.
Patterson, David. *Hebrew Language and Jewish Thought*, 164. London: Routledge Curzon, 2005.
Petsch, R. “The Sacred.” *The Monist,* Vol. 34, 2 (1924): 314-318.
Peters, Richard Stanley. *Moral Development and Moral Education*, 12. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981.
Philo, *On the Special Laws* (De Specialibus Legibus) IV, 24. Translated by Coulson, 85. London: W. Heinemann, 1937.
Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, 55. London: Routledge, 1962.
Pomerleau, Julie, Kenneth Pargament, and Annette Mahoney. “Seeing Life Through a Sacred Lens: The Spiritual Dimension of Meaning” in *To Think, To Cope, To Understand: Meaning in Positive Psychology and Existential Psychotherapy.* Edited by Pninit Russo-Netzer, Stefan Schulenberg, and Alexander Batthyany, 35-57. New York: Spring Press, 2016.
Post, Paul. “A Symbolic Bridge Between Faiths” in *Interaction between Judaism and Christianity in History, Religion, Art and Literature*. Edited by Marcel Poorthuis, Joshua Schwartz, and Joseph Turner, 357-374. Leiden: Brill, 2009.

Postlethwaite, Robert. “Giving Primacy to the Sacred: Some Implications for Teaching” Doctoral thesis, University of Toronto, 2003.
Procksch, Otto. “Hagios” *TDNT,* 1:89.
Rabinowitz, Louis Isaac and Warren Harvey. “Torah” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition*, 39. Edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 20. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.
Rappaport, Roy, Ellen Messer, and Michael Lambek. *Ecology and the Sacred: Engaging the Anthropology of Roy A. Rappaport.* Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2001.
Rawidowicz, Simon. *State of Israel, Diaspora, and Jewish Community*, 135-136. Hanover, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 1998.
Rawidowicz, Simon. *Israel: The Ever Dying People and Other Essays*, 135-136. Rutherford, Jew Jersey: Farliegh Dickinson University Press, 1986.
Rawls, Anne W., Adam Jeffery, and David Mann. “Locating the modern sacred: Moral/social facts and constitutive practices.” *Journal of Classical Sociology* 16, no. 1 (2016): 67.
Reines, Alvin J, “Time and Eternity” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd edition, 115. Edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 19. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.
Rennie, Bryan S. “The Sacred and Sacrality: From Eliade to Evolutionary Ethology.” *Religion,* 47:4 (2017): 668.
Richards, Alden Legrand. “The Secularization of the Academic Worldview: The History of a Process and its Consequences for the Study of Education.” Doctoral dissertation, Brigham Young University, 1982.
Ricoeur, Paul. *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
Ringgren, Helmer. *Israelite Religion.* Translated by David Green, 73-74. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966; reprint, London: S.P.C.K., 1974.
Ringgren, Helmer. “קדש *qdš*,” in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament,* 1182-1199. Stuttgart, Germany: Kohlhammer, 1995.
Rivlin, Asher E. *Equal to All of Them: The Pedagogy of the Sages (Khazal).* Tel Aviv: Sifriat Poalim Publishing House, Ltd., 1985.
Roney, R. Craig. “Back to the Basics with Storytelling.” *Reading Teacher* 42 no. 7 (1989): 520-23.
Rosenak, Michael. *Roads to the Palace: Jewish Texts and Teaching.* Providence, Rhode Island: Berghahn, 1995.
Ross, David. *Nicomachean Ethics: Aristotle Book 2.* Translated by David Ross, edited by Lesley Brown. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1908.
Rothschild, Fritz. *Between God and Man,* 214-218. New York: The Free Press, 1959.
Rubin, Ruth. *Voices of a People: The Story of Yiddish Folksong*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1979.
Rudge, Lucila Telles. “Holistic Education: An Analysis of its Pedagogical Application.” Doctoral dissertation, Ohio State University, 2008.
Russell, Bertrand. *Mysticism and Logic*, 410. London: Taylor Garnett Evans & Co. Ltd., 1954.
Sabki, A'ishah Ahmad and Glenn Hardaker. “The madrasah concept of Islamic pedagogy.” *Educational Review* 65, no. 3 (2013): 344.
Sanger, Matthew and Richard Osguthorpe. "Inquiring Into the Moral Work of Teaching and Teacher Education" in *The Moral Work of Teaching and Teacher Education: Preparing and Supporting Practitioners*, 3-13. New York: Teachers College Press, 2014.

Schechter, Solomon. *Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 199. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1909.
Schleiermacher, Friedrich . *Reden über die Religion.* Berlin, 1799.
Scholem. Gershom G. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism.* Jerusalem: Schocken Publishing, 1941.
Schram, Peninnah. *Jewish Stories One Generation Tells Another*, 366. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993.
Schwartz, Baruch J. "Israel's Holiness: The Torah Traditions," in *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus*. Edited by M.J.H.M Poorthuis and Joshua Schwartz. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
Schwartz, Hillel. "Sacred Time" in *Encyclopedia of Religion Vol. 12*, 7987. New York: McMillan, 2005.
Schwartzbaum, Avraham. *The Bamboo Cradle: A Jewish Father's Story*, 8. Jerusalem, Israel: Feldheim Publishers, 1988.
Schweid, Eliezer. *The Land of Israel: National Home or Land of Destiny*. Translated by Deborah Greniman, 62-63. London: Associated University Press, 1985.
Scruton, Roger. *The Soul of the World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2014.
Seeskin, Kenneth. "Holiness as an Ethical Ideal." *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy,* Vol. 5 (1996): 191-203.
Selms, A. van. "The Expression 'The Holy One of Israel'" in *Von Kanaan bis Kerala.* Edited by W.C. Delsman, J.T. Nelis, J. R. Peters, W. H. Römer, and A. S. Van der Woude, *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*. Edited by Kurt Bergerhof, M. Dietrich and O. Loretze, vol. 211, 257. Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1982.
Shapira, Kalonymus. *The Student's Obligation,* 4. Translated by M. Odenheimer. Northvale, New Jersey: Aronson, 1991.
Shapiro, David "The Meaning of Holiness in Judaism." *Tradition* 7:1 (1965): 46-80.
Shapiro, David "The Doctrine of the Image of God and *Imitatio Dei*" in *Studies in Jewish Thought, Vol. 1*, 57. New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1975.
Shapiro, David. "Wisdom and Knowledge of God in Biblical and Talmudic Thought." *Tradition* 12, no. 2 (1971): 70-89.
Shapiro, Malkah. *The Rebbe's Daughter: Memoir of a Hasidic Childhood*, xx. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002.
Shore, Eliezer. "Torah from the Heart: Chassidic Insights into Spiritual Education." http://www.eliezershore.com/uploads/1/8/7/5/1875295/torah_from_the_heart.pdf, 202.
Silberberg, Naftali. "Why Does Jewish Law Forbid Cremation?" *Chabad.org*, http://www.chabad.org/ library/article_cdo/aid/510874/jewish/Why-Does-Jewish-Law-Forbid-Cremation.htm
Silberman, Shoshana. *Siddur Shema Yisrael*, 89. New York: United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 1996.
Simmons, Annette. *The Story Factor: Inspiration, Influence, and Persuasion Through the Art of Storytelling.* New York: Basic Books, 2006.
Simcha Ha-Kohen of Divinsk, Meir. *Meshekh Hokhmah,* 504-510. Jerusalem, 1974.
Smart, Ninian. *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, 130. Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1996.
Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*, 104. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987.
Smith, Jonathan Z. "The Bare Facts of Ritual." *History of Religions* 20, no. 1, Twentieth Anniversary Issue (1980): 125.

Söderblom, Nathan. “Holiness” in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics.* Edited by James Hastings, 731. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1913.
Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *Out of the Whirlwind: Essays on Mourning, Suffering and the Human Condition.* Edited by David Schatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Rueven Ziegler, 143-144. New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 2003.
Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Prayer*. Edited by Shalom Carmy, 66-67. New York: HoRav Foundation, 2003.
Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *Family Redeemed: Essays on Family Relationships*. Edited by David Shatz, and Joel B. Wolowelsky. Hoboken, NJ: Toras HoRav Foundation, 2000.
Soloveitchik. Joseph B. *Halakhic Man.* Translated by Lawrence Kaplan, 41-43. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983.
Soloveitchik, Joseph B. *Shiurei HaRav*. Edited by Joseph Epstein, 7-8. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1974.
Soloveitchik, Joseph B. “Sacred and Profane: *Kodesh* and *Chol* in World Perspectives,” in *Gesher* 3, no. 1 (Sivan 5726 – June 1966): 91.
Spackman, Jonathan and Steven Yanchar. “Embodied Cognition, Representationalism, and Mechanism: A Review and Analysis.” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior* 44, no. 1 (2013): 71.
Spradley, James. *The Ethnographic Interview.* Belmont, California: Waveland Press, 2016.
Stausberg, Michael. “The Sacred and the Holy – From Around 1917 to Today.” *Religion*, 47, no. 4 (2017): 550.
Steinberg, Milton. *Basic Judaism*, 67. San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947.
Steiner, Rudolf. *Universe, Earth and Man: In Their Relationship to Egyptian Myths and Modern Civilization: Eleven Lectures Given in Stuttgart Between 4 and 16 August 1908.* London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1987.
Steinsaltz, Adin. *Teshuvah: A Guide for the Newly Observant Jew*, 28. New York: Free Press, 1987.
Susser, Bernard. “On the Reconstruction of Jewish Political Theory.” *Forum,* no.45 Jerusalem: World Zionist Organization (1982):76.
Tanna debe Eliyyahu. *The Lore of the School of Elijah*. Translated by W.G. Braude and I.J. Kapstein. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1981.
Tarakeshwar, Nalini, Aaron Swank, Kenneth Pargament, and Annette Mahoney. “The Sanctification of Nature and Theological Conservatism: A Study of Opposing Religious Correlates of Environmentalism.” *Review of Religious Research*, 42 (2001): 387-404.
Tauber, Yanki. “Telling Stories.” Chabad.org. http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2862/ jewish/Telling-Stories.htm
Taves, Ann. “Building Blocks of Sacralities” in *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Edited by Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, 138-161. New York: Guilford Press, 2013.
Thienhaus, Ole J. “Jewish Time: Ancient Practice, Hellenistic and Modern Habits, Freud's Reclaiming.” *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 48, no.4 (1999): 444.
Thomas, Taffy and Steve Killick. *Telling Tales: Storytelling as Emotional Literacy*. Blackburn, United Kingdom: Educational Printing Services Limited, 2007.
Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology.* Vol. 1, 216. Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1951.
Tillson, John. “In Favour of Ethics Education, Against Religious Education.” *Journal of Philosophy of Education 45*, no. 4 (2011): 675-688.
Todd, Nathan R., Jaclyn D. Houston, and Charlynn A. Odahl-Ruan. "Preliminary

Validation of the Sanctification of Social Justice Scale." *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 6, no. 3 (2014): 245-256.
Tuer of Cernowitz, Hayyim. *Sidduro shel Shabbat*, 8c. Jerusalem, 1872.
Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure.* New Brunswick: Aldine Transaction, 1967.
Unterman, Alan, Howard Kreisel and Rivka G. Horwitz, "Ruach HaKodesh" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition*, 506-507. Edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 17. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.
Unterman, Alan, Rivka G. Horowit, Joseph Dan, and Sharon Faye Koren, "Shkeinah" in *Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd edition*, 440-444. Edited by Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 18. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007.
van der Leeuw, Gerardus. *Religion in Essence and Manifestation: A Study in Phenomenology*. Edited by Ninian Smart, John Evan Turner. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1938.
Van Gennep, Arnold. *The Rites of Passage.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1909] 2011. Wagner, Roy. "Mana" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, 2nd edition*. Edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 8, 5631. Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 2005.
Verman, Mark. "The Torah as Divine Fire," *The Jewish Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2007): 94-102.
Wagner, Roy. "Taboo" in *Encyclopedia of Religion.* Edited by Lindsay Jones, Vol. 14, 8947. Detroit, MI: MacMillan Reference, 1987.
Waltke, Bruce K. and Michael Patrick O'Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax,* 489-490. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990.
Weber, Max. *The Sociology of Religion.* Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1922.
Wein, Avraham. "Of Perspective and Paradox: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Analysis of Holiness." *The Jewish Thought Magazine of the Yeshiva University Student Body*, November 2016.
Wiesel, Elie. *Hope, Despair and Memory*, Nobel Lecture, December 11, 1986.
Widder, Wendy. *To Teach in Ancient Israel: A Cognitive Linguistic Study of a Biblical Hebrew Lexical Set*. Boston: de Gruyter, 2014.
Wilson, E. Jan. "*Holiness" and "Purity" in Mesopotamia*, 85. Vluyn: Verlag Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1994.
Wolfson, H.A. *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam Vol. 2*, 32. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1948.
Wrzesniewski, Amy, Clark McCauley, Paul Rozin, and Barry Schwartz, "Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work." *Journal of Research in Personality* 31 (1997): 21-33.
Yanchar, Steven C. "Participational Agency." *Review of General Psychology*, 15, no. 3 (2011): 277.
Yerushalmi, Yosef Hayim. *Zakhor*: *Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1996.