

A Farewell to Print: What Remains Holy

Susan Berrin

For the past 48 years, readers have turned to *Sh'ma* to find the widest range of voices in conversation about difficult issues. During that time, as diverse as our themes have been, all of our issues have had one thing in common: They have been published in *print*, as a stand-alone journal, and since 2015 as an insert in the *Forward*. With the *Forward's* recent decision to cease print publication, this issue — our 746th since the journal's founding in May, 1970 — will be the final print edition; going forward, *Sh'ma* will become a digital-only journal. We will continue to publish a printable PDF each month and to post essays and our simulated Talmud page, *NiSh'ma*, on line. And we will continue to communicate with you via eblasts — so stay in touch with us (Forward.com/shma-signup).

With each issue — beginning with Dr. Eugene Borowitz's launch focusing on the Vietnam War, through the editorial leadership of Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin and my own 21-year tenure as editor-in-chief — we have invited readers into a sacred space, a *makom kadosh* of thoughtful discourse. As the journal moved from a biweekly to a monthly, as we pushed the boundaries of pluralism, as we migrated from a "journal of Jewish responsibility" to one focused on "Jewish sensibilities," examining universal questions through an expansive Jewish lens — we have always nurtured discovery and curiosity.

Each month, I've tried to create a place of sanctuary where we, as Jews, might explicate our own difficult texts, examine our habits and assumptions, explore our rituals and liturgy, and imagine new paths forward. I hope we have contributed to a spiritually and emotionally sustaining space where ideas can flourish. With all of our choices — from the solicitation of essays to the working with writers (the vast majority of whom have written for us without compensation, for contributors' copies only) — I've tried to raise up and nurture unsung voices and temper loud and bullish ones.

Today, as we move into our next chapter, we mourn the loss of a paper edition, one that we can hold, read on Shabbat, mark up with notes and questions, use as a teaching text, and return to again and again. We also look forward to a more robust digital presence and to publishing an easy-to-download and easy to print and read PDF with our thought-provoking discussion guide, "Consider and Converse." I'll look forward to your feedback on how *Sh'ma* can remain relevant and iterative in this digital era. Please send suggestions to ShmaDigital@shma.com.

This issue's theme, *makom kadosh*, was selected long before the *Forward's* decision to cease its paper edition. Nonetheless, it feels oddly suitable. For me, as well as so many of my generation, little has felt more holy or indispensable to spiritual and intellectual sustenance than the printed word on paper. Reading paper forces us to pause in a way that

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NiSh'ma

On this page, our three commentators — asylum seekers and their caregivers — examine a verse from the Book of Exodus in which God asks the Israelites to create holy ground that God might live among the desert wanderers. Our online version is interactive, and we welcome your comments. —S.B.



Dafna Lichtman: When I read this phrase the most important word in it is “sanctuary” — a holy place, where people come to worship, be in community, and do holy work, but also a place of refuge and safety — and that is not a coincidence. In this line from Exodus, sanctuary

does not refer to a specific structure or institution. Rather, it is God dwelling among the people; holiness is found in actions toward fellow humans. For the past nine years, I have worked with asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea in south Tel Aviv. Every single day, through my work at the Garden Library, my colleagues and I help people navigate a complicated system to secure refuge in Israel. And, for those the state rejects, we try to be their sanctuary, to do holy work among them.

In this place, where people share intricate stories about their homes and the reasons they escaped to Israel, they never feel as though they are strangers. They come to meet other people, create community, and engage in social change. Our art programs allow people to transcend the obstacles of everyday life, the language barriers, the pain. Through art, we express collective emotions around our painful shared history.

Although some of these people may be allowed to stay in Israel, they will never feel safe; without asylum status, they face constant threats of detention and deportation. Into this void, we provide classes and opportunities to learn about, engage in, and experience civic society and community.

Sanctuary is therefore found among people. God knows that physical structures are not what sustains holy work; humans make holy work happen. And our established networks hold holy protected space for others.

Dafna Lichtman is director of the Garden Library, a community center and library in Tel Aviv meeting the needs of Sudanese and Eritrean refugees; it offers life skill and art classes and opportunities to build culture and community. She is currently completing her master's degree in anthropology at Tel-Aviv University.



Liz Jacobs: As I write, I am sitting at Jalilah's bedside in Oakland's county hospital emergency room where she faces an as yet undiagnosed, potentially serious, health issue. Jalilah is a young lesbian refugee from Uganda. She fled to Kenya and ended up in Kakuma refugee camp for close to three years, where the community of about 250 queer Ugandans faces daily violence and persecution. She was granted refugee status by the U.N. High Commission on Refugees and is one of the few to be resettled in the U.S. recently, as there have been drastic cuts to our refugee program by the Trump administration.

I met Jalilah a year ago through my volunteer work with the Jewish Family & Children's Services-East Bay. I serve on an accompaniment team of Kehilla Community Synagogue members, who assist immigrants as they settle into their new lives in California. After Jalilah's housing plans fell through, she moved in with me and my wife, where she has lived for the past year.

I think of *makom kadosh*, sacred space, as sanctuary. We are honored to provide our home as a safe, supportive place where Jalilah knows that she will not go to sleep hungry and where she will have the freedom to pursue her dreams.

When she first arrived, Jalilah stayed in her room watching movies, reading, and talking to her friends from the refugee camp. Jalilah's quest for a new start has been slowed down because of her medical issues. She will stay with us until she has recovered fully and is ready to pursue work. She is now family.

Liz Jacobs is a registered nurse and lifelong activist who has worked with the California Nurses Association as a union organizer and a communications specialist. She and her wife, Kasey, live in Oakland, Calif., and are members of the Kehilla Community Synagogue. **Jalilah Nansamba** is a 25-year-old Ugandan lesbian who fled extreme trauma and spent nearly three years in one of Africa's largest refugee camps. She is being resettled by Jewish Family & Community Services-East Bay, a local affiliate of HIAS.



Togod Omer: I am Togod, an asylum seeker from Sudan living in Israel. I am not Jewish. My early connections to faith faded as I fled political persecution in my home and struggled on the migration route. This verse on the left (Exodus 25:8) reminds me of our initial arrival in Israel.

וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ
וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְּתוֹכָם.

“And let them make for Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among/within them.”

– Exodus 25:8

I think we imagined the whole country to be a place of sanctuary. We know the Bible, and we expected the Jewish people — because of their history and faith — to give us shelter as refugees fleeing genocide, coming by foot through the Sinai desert. But we discovered this was not the case, as no refugee status is possible for us, even after 10 years.

Today, asylum seekers remain threatened with deportation; we are criminalized and we feel unsafe. And yet, I find an unusual and deeply satisfying feeling of safety and faith when I work with Israelis, fellow migrants, and asylum seekers. As Dafna Lichtman writes, the Garden Library provides a haven where I now feel a measure of protection. Surrounded by poverty, drug use, and crime, we — asylum seekers, migrants, and south Tel Aviv residents — find safe space. Dozens of Israeli volunteers work with us and teach our children.

At the culture center, I meet members of Israeli groups who come to learn about the situation. When I share my story, I often see that I've punctured their assumptions, what they've heard on the media about us. People listen; sometimes they share their parents' stories of seeking refuge years ago. This becomes a holy moment for me. It gives me strength and courage for the next talk, for the next struggle, for the next day.

Togod Omer is the coordinator of the culture center at the Garden Library. Since arriving alone in Israel in 2011 from Darfur, Togod has been seeking asylum. Without an answer to his asylum request, he lives without legal status. Togod has a degree in textile engineering from Sudan. In 2016, he began studying at Atid College in Tel Aviv. He also works as a programmer at Toonimo, a start-up in Tel Aviv.

Photo of Togod Omer by Sonia Chaim

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a screen does not; it encourages us to uni-task — slowly and reflectively.

This issue delves into questions about what makes a space holy: Is a place sacred because of its location — like Jacob's ladder — or because of what happens there — a synagogue or mikvah — or because of what we do to make it holy — creating sanctuary for asylum seekers. Like many *Sh'ma* issues, *Makom Kadosh* provides existential questions to wrestle with and offers us agency to create an even slightly more perfect world.

Susan Berrin has been the editor-in-chief of *Sh'ma* since 1998. She is also editor of two anthologies, *Celebrating the New Moon: A Rosh Chodesh Anthology* and *A Heart of Wisdom: Making the Jewish Journey from Midlife Through the Elder Years*. She is a board member of The Jewish Studio Project in Berkeley, Calif., where she lives with her husband, Steve Zipperstein.

Opening the Door for God

Amy Kalmanofsky

Jews are known more for holy time than holy space — for sanctifying moments and building what Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel called palaces in time. The Torah, though, is very concerned with holy space, and the Land of Israel and the Temple in Jerusalem are the primary focus of the Torah's laws and narratives.

What are generally understood as holy sites today — places of historical or communal significance where grand or gruesome things happened, or places of natural wonder where we stand in awe and recognize God's handiwork — are not what are understood as sacred sites in the Torah.

Rather, in the Torah, holy sites are portals that welcome God's presence into the world and that allow humans to engage and appeal to God. They are places in which individuals not only recognize God's presence but also feel God's presence. They are places saturated with God. Patriarch Jacob may express this best. Waking

up from his dream in which a ladder connects heaven to earth, Jacob says: "Indeed, God is in this place, and I did not know it" (Genesis 28:16). Jacob knows he has stumbled upon a gateway to heaven.

Similarly, Moses finds himself on holy ground in the third chapter of the Book of Exodus. While herding sheep, Moses turns to see a burning bush that is not destroyed. Though curious, he does not recognize that he is standing on "holy ground" [אדמה-קדש]. God must tell him.

The experiences of Jacob and Moses suggest that humans recognize holy spaces rather than make them. In these stories, it is God who breaks through to saturate and sanctify space. Humans simply respond. But another paradigm exists in which humans break through to God and God responds. Released from the ark after the flood, Noah, of his own volition, builds an altar and offers sacrifices to God. Responding to the sweet smells, God vows never again to doom the Earth and its creatures, and then blesses Noah and his children. In Genesis 12, following God's command, Abraham heads to the land of Canaan. He arrives at Ai, builds an altar, and boldly calls to God to invoke God's presence. And Exodus 19:3 suggests that Moses climbs Mount Sinai to meet God before God calls to him.

These stories reveal that humans can open the portal to God and sanctify space. This paradigm appeals to me for two reasons. First, it empowers humans and suggests that we can recognize *and* construct holy spaces. Holiness is not *necessarily* an integral component of a place. Knowing this enables humans to transform any place into sacred space by welcoming the Divine.

I'm also drawn to this paradigm because it conveys the notion that holy space is where God's presence is both recognized and felt. Contemporary Jews are often more comfortable recognizing God than feeling God. This certainly is true for me. I easily marvel at the natural world's design that attests to the supernatural.

And yet I want a holy place to be more than a marvel. I want it to be a place of communion where I both recognize *and* feel God's presence.

In Torah, there are portals that allow God and humans to commune. Sometimes, God opens the door for humans. Other times, humans open the door for God.

Rabbi **Amy Kalmanofsky**, PhD, is the dean of List College at the Jewish Theological Seminary and the Blanche and Romie Shapiro Associate Professor of Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Holiness Is Not Stagnant

Susan Silverman

Makom kadosh. The Hebrew term for "sacred space" sounds solid, like a Temple. An implication of permanence — something unmovable, without its own transformative capacity.

But an edifice is anything but permanent; it is subject to disappearing at the whims of humanity, the power of the elements. The aliveness of an edifice is found in the metaphors and stories that shape human history.

A place can represent possibility. For example, the Kotel, or Western Wall, at the site of the Second Temple in Jerusalem has served as a symbol of our hope to be a free people in our own land for centuries. As a place, now in our own nation, it is a location for prayer and has become a place of struggle — between an evolving and stagnant Torah.

One of the names for God is "*Makom*," "Place." Another name for God is "*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*," "I Will Be What I Will Be," noting that God is always-in-process. God contracts to make room for creation. God evolves and changes. Holiness is not stagnant. Nor is it ossified in stone. The Kotel as a symbol out of reach, prior to Israel's capturing the Old City in 1967, felt more holy to me than it does now in our hands, because then it made us all partners with God in imagining possibility. I hope one day the Kotel becomes a *Makom*/Place of contraction-and-growth in partnership with *Makom/Asher-Ehyeh*,

God/Place as ever-changing.

My family, who live a half-hour's walk from the Kotel, was created through birth and adoption. Our daughters were born to us; our sons were adopted from Ethiopia. Once we were matched with our youngest son, then four years old and living in a large group home in Addis Ababa, I looked at his picture and wondered how this one child, of all the children waiting for families in the whole world, became ours.

The rabbis describe God's choice of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem in this way: Revelation could have happened anywhere, but after God chose the Land of Israel, all other lands were eliminated. All of Israel could have sufficed, but God chose Jerusalem. All of Jerusalem could have served as the Holy Place, but God singled out the Temple. As we considered adoption, we settled on a country, Ethiopia, at which point all other lands were eliminated. Then we settled on an orphanage, after which all other orphanages were eliminated. Then we settled on a child, and all other children were eliminated. I called the adoption agency and claimed the boy named Kedir.

When I read this text about the Temple 12 years ago, I was moved by the sense of destiny embedded in the inexplicable. The Temple had been chosen by God simply because it *was*. Over time, however, I am struck by the description of the Temple not as a holy edifice, but as revelation — merely a historic representation of an eternal unfolding. Our son, too, was in a place that physically represented a moment in the unfolding of our new, ever-changing family covenant.

His name, Kedir, is the Arabic word for “pottery,” which is similar to the Hebrew, *kadar*. There are many rabbinic references to God as Potter and humanity as the vessel God created. But that metaphor does not allow for metamorphosis, for what we hoped would emerge from the re-creation of our family. Until adoption, by necessity, this child had been like pottery, shaped by the loving hands of God in the form of a caring aunt, a

charity organization, and the staff of an orphanage. But with a shift of only two Hebrew letters, his new name, Zamir (song), would symbolize his transformation from passive vessel to active singer of his own song in the loving Abramowitz-Silverman choir.

I think of our family as a *makom kadosh*. This is not because we come anywhere close to perfection, but because we are not bound by the structure of DNA. Rather, we are bound together in our openness; *Nihyeh asher nihyeh* — We will be what we will be.

Rabbi [Susan Silverman](#) is the founder of Second Nurture: Every Child Deserves a Family. Her memoir, *Casting Lots: Creating a Family in a Beautiful, Broken World*, weaves together adoption and Judaism. She is also a founder of Miklat Israel, an NGO formed to assist Israel in creating a just, compassionate, and sustainable solution for its asylum seekers. She and her spouse, Yosef Abramowitz, have five children and live in Israel.

Heschel's Antidote to Land Obsession

Shai Held

It is one of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's most famous and influential claims: Judaism's central concern is time rather than space. As he puts it in *The Sabbath*, “Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time” (italics Heschel's). For Heschel, “The main themes of faith lie in the realm of time. We remember the day of the exodus from Egypt, the day when Israel stood at Sinai; and our Messianic hope is the expectation of a day, of the end of days.” Accordingly, for Heschel, Jewish liturgical life is an “architecture of time”; Judaism's “great cathedral” is Shabbat, built not in space but in time.

Heschel's prioritization of time over space is so profound that even when, in the wake of the 1967 war, he writes a book about the meaning of the Land of Israel for Jews, he titles it *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* and writes that Israel is “a land where time transcends space, where space is a dimension of time.”

Heschel grounds his vision for

humanity in a commitment to self-transcendence. He distinguishes between “reflexive concern,” which is a focus on the self and its needs, and “transitive concern,” which is a focus on the interests of others. We become most truly human, Heschel contends, when we are genuinely committed to the well-being of others and not just ourselves. This contrast between reflexive and transitive concern, according to Lawrence Kaplan, a professor at McGill University, is the key to understanding Heschel's privileging of time over space. For Heschel, “Time is linked to transitive concern and space to reflexive concern.” Whereas the realm of time is about giving, yielding, and sharing, the realm of space is about owning, possessing, and controlling. As Heschel describes it, “We share time, [but] we own space.” In other words, whereas space is associated with self-assertion, time is connected to self-transcendence.

Heschel's insistence that Judaism is about time rather than space is grounded in a beautiful *midrash* about the first creation story in Genesis (1:1-2:3): God creates the heavens and the earth and the multifarious and wondrous life forms that inhabit them. But the story culminates in God's sanctification not of the earth as a whole or of any parcel thereof, but rather of the seventh day. As Heschel notes in *The Sabbath*, the word *kadosh* (holy) is introduced for the first time to describe time rather than space: “There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness.”

It is extremely hard to reconcile Heschel's claim with the rest of the Torah. At the very core of God's covenant with Abraham is the promise of land (for example, Genesis 15:18-21). Much of the Torah, in fact, is focused on the people's journey toward the land and God's revelation of laws to govern their life in that land. Heschel's stark contrast notwithstanding, for the Bible, and for Judaism more broadly, space matters a great deal. And contra Heschel, the messianic hope of

Judaism is not just “the expectation of a day, of the end of days”; it is also about the return of the people of Israel to the Land of Israel. It is a dream of time as well as of space, not of one *as opposed* to the other.

It is striking that until recently Heschel's ideas did not have much resonance in Israel. After all, for people engaged in a reclamation of the land after thousands of years of separation from it, a thinker who insists that Judaism is about time rather than space may well seem marginal, or even irrelevant. But recently in Israel, there has been a burgeoning interest in Heschel's thought with several volumes of his writings translated into Hebrew for the first time and new monographs by Israeli scholars. I get the sense that many young seekers are interested in engaging deeply with his thought. This contemporary enthusiasm seems to stem at least in part from the same “demotion” of space (in this context, land) that had once yielded indifference to him. At a time when many religious seekers are hungry for a religiously serious and passionate alternative to the land-obsessed theology of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook and his religious Zionist followers, a thinker such as Heschel represents a welcome breath of fresh and restorative air.

More generally, Heschel's anxieties about an excessive focus on space have turned out to be tragically well-founded. To read the daily newspaper is to be reminded time and again that a preoccupation with space can indeed be a massive obstacle to self-transcendence and transitive concern. Space is integral to Judaism, and we should honor that idea and take it seriously. But Heschel's words remind us that some things — like peace, human life, and human dignity — are indeed more important than space.

Rabbi [Shai Held](#) is president and dean at Hadar, a pluralistic learning community in New York. He is the author of *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence* and *The Heart of Torah: Essays on the Weekly Torah Portion*. He is at work on a book about the centrality of love in Jewish theology, spirituality, and ethics.

Reconciling Holy Space & Time

Marc Zvi Brettler

Holiness is an essential attribute of God, who is called more than 30 times in the Bible “*Kadosh Yisrael*,” “the Holy One of Israel.” From the biblical perspective, whatever or whoever comes into contact with God is, or can be, holy: the people Israel, sacred times, physical objects related to the divine service (e.g., sacrificial animals or Temple incense), and particular places.

Contemporary Judaism emphasizes holy time. As Shai Held writes, Abraham Joshua Heschel's masterful *The Sabbath* has played a crucial role in giving priority to sacred time over sacred place. But the concept of holy space is central to Judaism.

Holy space is space that is strongly associated with God. It is first mentioned in Exodus 3:5, where Moses is told at the burning bush, which manifests the divine presence, “Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.” The Jerusalem Temple and its predecessor, the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), are both called *Mikdash*, a name derived from the word for holy or sanctified (places).

Both the site of the burning bush and the Tabernacle dedicated in the wilderness were holy spaces outside the Land of Israel. But holiness is especially associated with the Temple in Jerusalem, where some manifestation of God was imagined to reside. This holiness is sometimes extended beyond the Temple precinct; thus the prophet Joel speaks of God “dwell[ing] in Zion, my holy mount. And [all of] Jerusalem shall be holy” (4:17). Elsewhere, this holiness encompasses the entire Land of Israel (Zechariah 2:16). It is unclear if this holiness emanates outward from the Temple — connected to some aspect of God's residence at the Jerusalem Temple — or if it is more closely associated with the idea of God's special care for the land (Numbers 35:34).

For most of the Bible, therefore, it was crucial to worship God in the Land of Israel. In Psalms we read, “How can we

sing a song of the LORD on alien soil?” (137:4). This same idea is reflected in two relatively unknown biblical stories. In Joshua 22, the two-and-a-half tribes who settle east of the Jordan River — in other words, outside of the recognized boundaries of Israel — build an altar there. They are severely castigated by leaders living in Israel proper and are told: “What is this treachery that you have committed this day against the God of Israel, turning away from the LORD, building yourselves an altar, and rebelling this day against the LORD? (22:16) ... If it is because the land of your holding is unclean, cross over into the land of the LORD's own holding, where the Tabernacle of the LORD abides, and acquire holdings among us...” (22:19). Similarly, when David flees from Saul and is concerned that he might be forced to leave Israel, he complains that leaving Israel will force him to worship other gods (1 Samuel 26:19).

But for (almost) every biblical tradition, we find a counter-tradition. The prophet Ezekiel was exiled to Babylonia in 597 B.C.E., 11 years before the destruction of the First Temple in 586. Like the author of Psalm 137, he had to imagine whether the divine presence in any form followed the people into exile. In 11:16, he reaches a remarkable compromise — that God is with Israel but as a *mikdash me'at*, a mini-temple or mini-sanctification. (This usage is often misunderstood to suggest that the synagogue, a mini-Temple, originated during this exile.) If Psalm 137 insists that God cannot be worshiped in foreign, impure Babylonia, Ezekiel states just the opposite.

We now follow the example of Ezekiel: We pray as Jews outside the Land of Israel. But holiness has been further transformed. Whether in Israel or in the Diaspora, the synagogue ark, where the Torah scrolls are stored, is called in Hebrew *aron hakodesh*, “the holy ark” — using the same root *k.d.sh*, “to be holy,” used in earlier texts to describe the Temple, Jerusalem, and Israel. Afghani Jews call it *heichal hakodesh*, “the holy temple,” employing the word *heichal*, which is often used for

the Jerusalem Temple in the Bible. The Torah scrolls, through which God is now manifest, convey holiness to the ark, allowing us to experience holiness both in and outside of Israel. This builds upon Ezekiel's innovation that holiness is not confined to the Land of Israel. Instead of finding holiness in a place or in time, we endow holiness to a sacred object standing at the center of each Jewish community.

Marc Zvi Brettler, a biblical scholar, is the Bernice and Morton Lerner Professor in Judaic Studies in the Center for Jewish Studies at Duke University. He is currently working on a commentary on the Book of Psalms while enjoying a sabbatical in Jerusalem.

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Sh'ma Now

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Jewish sensibilities are ideas, values, and behaviors that provide inspiration and guidance to respond creatively and thoughtfully to life's challenges and opportunities. This month, *Sh'ma Now* explores "*makom kadosh*," sacred space. Our discussion guide, "**Consider and Converse: Makom Kadosh**" walks you through this issue, inspires reflections, prompts questions, and provides ways to connect this reading with other meaningful experiences. It is found online at forward.com/shma-now.



Art by Victor Raphael

Consider & Converse

A Guide to “*makom
kadosh*/sacred space

Introduction

Sh'ma Now curates conversations on a single theme rooted in Jewish tradition and the contemporary moment. At the heart of this issue of *Sh'ma Now* is the Jewish sensibility of “*makom kadosh*”/ **sacred space**. I was drawn to this topic for two very specific reasons. Since reading — decades ago — Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s book, *The Sabbath*, I have been intrigued with the idea that “Judaism is a *religion of time*...” When I edited a volume on Rosh Chodesh, the holiday marking the New Moon, in the 1990s, I was brought again deeply into the realm of Jewish time. But the Torah also tells us about significant places — for example the spot where Jacob dreamt of a ladder to heaven and, of course, all of the writing about the Land of Israel. I’m generally quite intrigued by these Jewish contradictions — what can we tease out and how do we understand this ambiguity? The second reason I’ve been so drawn to the theme of *makom kadosh* is because of the question: What makes a space holy? Is a place sacred because of its location — as designated in the Torah — or because of what happens there — such as a synagogue or mikvah — or because of what we do to make it holy: for example, providing safe and friendly sanctuary to asylum seekers?

Sh'ma Now has never viewed learning or “meaning-making” as solely an individual activity. That’s why we have included this guide, which is specifically designed to help you to consider the idea of going forth independently or with others, formally and informally.

How to Begin

This guide offers a variety of suggestions, including activities and prompts for individual contemplation and informal or structured conversations. We suggest that you use this guide to share reflections and thoughts over a Shabbat meal, or, for those who are more adventurous, to lead a planned, structured conversation, inviting a small group of friends and family to your home or to a coffee shop. If you would like more information about ways in which this journal can be used, please contact Susan Berrin, *Sh'ma Now* editor-in-chief, at SBerrin@shma.com. You can also print out a PDF file of the entire issue at <http://forward.com/shma-now/>.

Consider & Converse

A Guide to “*makom kadosh*”/sacred space

Guidelines for Discussion

If you wish to hold a structured conversation, the following guidelines may help you to create a space that allows for honest personal exploration through sharing:

- Create a sense of shared purpose that can foster the kind of internal reflection that happens through group conversation.
- Remind participants of simple ground rules for conversations. For example: Avoid commenting on and critiquing each other’s comments. Make room for everyone to speak. Step into or away from the conversation appropriately. No one participant should dominate the conversation. Let silence sit, allowing participants to gather their thoughts.
- For each of the questions below, we recommend that you print out the article in question, or provide the link to it, and we ask that you take a moment to read it in print or on screen, before the conversation begins.
- Allow people a few minutes to absorb the article, perhaps even to read it a second time, before moving into the discussion.

Interpretive Questions

can focus the reader on the ideas in the articles.

- Rabbi **Amy Kalmanofsky**, [page 3] dean of List College and the Blanche and Romie Shapiro Associate Professor of Bible at the Jewish Theological Seminary, writes that holy places in the Torah “are portals that welcome God’s presence into the world and that allow humans to engage and appeal to God.” For example, Jacob’s ladder or the encounter Moses has with the burning bush that is not consumed. She goes on to problematize this idea, to give humans agency in creating sacred space: “These stories reveal that humans can open the portal to God and sanctify space. This paradigm appeals to me for two reasons. First, it empowers humans *and* suggests that we can mark and construct holy spaces. Holiness is *not necessarily* an integral component of a place. Knowing this enables humans to transform any place into sacred space by welcoming the Divine.” How do you think about sacred space? Is it created by humans or divined by God? What are the ramifications of that difference? How would you describe the manifestations of Jewish sacred space?
- Rabbi **Susan Silverman**, [page 3] founder of Second Nurture: Every Child Deserves a Family and author of a memoir, *Casting Lots: Creating a Family in a Beautiful, Broken World*, writes that one of God’s many names is “*Makom*” or “*Place*.” God is also called “*Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh*,” “I Will Be What I Will Be,” which shows that God is always-in-process, evolving. What is the relationship between a God that evolves and a God whose name is “*Place*”? Susan goes on to write: “Holiness is not stagnant. Nor is it ossified in stone.” Personally, Susan feels that the Kotel, the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, felt more sacred as a symbol when it was out of reach — before 1967 when it became part of Jerusalem — when “it made us all partners with God in imagining possibility.” What is the connection between sacred space and having agency and partnering with God? How do you understand the sacredness of the Kotel — is it sacred as a national symbol of the Jewish people? Does it remain a sacred place even given the violence in its plaza over the rights of women to pray in a quorum?

Consider & Converse

A Guide to “*makom kadosh*”/sacred space

- **Marc Zvi Brettler**, [page 5] a biblical scholar and professor of Jewish Studies at Duke University, demonstrates just how complex the idea of “*makom kadosh*” is. He examines whether holiness is intrinsic to the Land of Israel or whether it is associated with special divine presence that can be found outside Jerusalem and Israel. He shows that in most biblical references, “it was crucial to worship God in the Land of Israel.” He then says, “But for (almost) every biblical tradition, we find a counter-tradition.” Is sacred space a place that is created by holy acts or is it divinely established? Marc makes a point, quoting the prophet Ezekiel, that the divine presence followed the Jewish people into exile in Babylonia. Does it change matters if Jews now have a sovereign nation in the Land of Israel?

Reflective Questions

can help one to integrate the ideas in these articles with one’s own sense of self.

- Rabbi **Shai Held**, [page 4] president and dean at Hadar, a pluralistic learning community in New York and author of *Abraham Joshua Heschel: The Call of Transcendence*, writes that the biblical story of Creation “culminates in God’s sanctification not of the earth as a whole or of any parcel thereof, but rather of the seventh day. As Heschel notes in *The Sabbath*, the word *kadosh* (holy) is introduced for the first time to describe time rather than space.” And yet, Shai points out, “It is extremely hard to reconcile Heschel’s claim with the rest of the Torah. At the very core of God’s covenant with Abraham is the promise of land (for example, Genesis 15:18-21). Much of the Torah, in fact, is focused on the people’s journey toward the land and God’s revelation of laws to govern their life in that land.” How do you reconcile this paradox? Is Judaism a religion that privileges time over place—or place over time? How do you integrate Jewish thought on time into your life? Jewish thought about sacred space?
- In *NiSh’ma*, [page 2] our simulated Talmud page, three commentators — asylum seekers and their caregivers — examine a verse from the Book of Exodus where God asks the Israelites to create holy ground that God might live among the desert wanderers. **Dafna Lichtman**, director of the Garden Library, a community center and library in Tel Aviv meeting the needs of Sudanese and Eritrean refugees, writes that “Sanctuary is therefore found among people. God knows that physical structures are not what sustains holy work; humans make holy work happen.” Her thought — that “place” is made holy by human work — is echoed by **Togod Omer**, a Sudanese refugee and asylum seeker and **Liz Jacobs**, a nurse and activist who has sheltered and given sanctuary to **Jalilah Nansamba**, a 25-year-old Ugandan refugee. What forms of sanctuary do you imagine the Jewish community could offer refugees and asylum seekers today? How do you understand the current immigration issue in the U.S. through the lens of Jewish history? Does your family have stories about finding shelter or giving shelter to those in need?

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Call to Action

Helping Refugees and Asylum Seekers

- [JFCS](#) East Bay provides professional assistance to immigrants and refugees applying for a range of immigration legal services. The Jewish Family & Children Services' resettlement program serves refugees from around the world, particularly focusing on those who have experienced persecution based on their religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity.
- [HIAS](#) stands for a world in which refugees find welcome, safety, and freedom. HIAS rescues people whose lives are in danger for being who they are by protecting the most vulnerable refugees, helping them build new lives and reuniting them with their families in safety and freedom
- [T'ruah](#) – the rabbinic call for human rights: T'ruah works as part of an interfaith network to mobilize synagogues and other communities to protect those facing deportation or other immigration challenges. By becoming “mikdash” or sanctuary synagogues, communities pledge to take concrete actions, which may include legal support, housing, financial help, and other assistance for the sojourners in our midst. If your congregation is interested in becoming a sanctuary community or in learning more, please contact T'ruah's Director of Organizing Rabbi Salem Pearce at spearce@truah.org.
- [The Garden Library](#) – The Garden Library was established upon the belief that culture and education are basic human rights that bridge differences between communities and individuals and can affect lasting social change. The mission of the Garden Library is to promote the human rights of the members of the asylum-seeker, refugee, and foreign communities through sport, art, cultural, and educational activities. To this end, the Garden Library sponsors a range of programs aimed at equipping these individuals with tools and skills to enhance their opportunities in the job market, enhance their understanding of Israeli society, and enlarge their capacities to advocate for their rights.