SUBMISSION AND RECEIPT OF CLASS OF 2007

COMPLETED RABBINIC THESIS

I, _Mark Miller_, hereby submit two (2) copies of my/our
(Please print)
completed thesis in final form, entitled

Qedushah: A Biblical Guide to Holiness

Feb. 23, 2007

Student Signature / Date:

Additional Students, if applicable (please print, sign, and date)

"The author has my permission to submit this thesis in partial fulfillment for requirement for ordination."

Name of Advisor: _Tamara Cohn Eskenazi_

Signature of Advisor: _Tamara Cohn Eskenazi_

RECEIPT BY REGISTRAR

The above named thesis was received by the Registrar's Office

RECEIVED FEB 2 8 2007

Date

Registrar

by

קְדוּשה

A BIBLICAL GUIDE TO HOLINESS

Mark Miller
January 2007
Rabbinic Thesis
Advisor – Dr. Tamara Cohn Eskenazi

Table of Contents

SECTION 1: BASIC DEFINITIONS OF HOLINESS

SECTION 2: NEW TRENDS IN HOLINESS

Section 3: An Expanding Notion of Holiness in *Tanakh*

Chapter 1:
Introduction and scope of the question

In 1924, Rudolf Otto declared that we need "to invent a [new] term to stand for 'the holy.'"[1] He argued that "we generally take 'holy' as meaning 'completely good'; it is the absolute moral attribute, denoting the consummation of moral goodness ... but this common usage of the term is inaccurate ... If the ethical element was present at all, at any rate it was not original and never constituted the whole meaning of the word."[2]

As Otto suggests, the meaning of "holiness" has become nebulous and confused. We continue to use concepts like holy and holiness on a regular basis, but without a concrete understanding of what they mean. In fact, an informal survey of friends and colleagues that I conducted recently reveals a fascinating lack of precision and consistency when it comes to the concept of holiness. Among a multitude of responses, some people defined holiness as:

- "The state of striving toward justice, compassion, equality and loving-kindness."

- "Holiness is the reflection or evidence of the presence of God in an experience I have, something or someone I encounter, some place that I visit."

- "Godlike. But the 'rabbinic school' definition of separateness comes up right after."

- "Holiness is something that must be created, in that it needs humans to feel it, to push for it, to make it happen, to exist."

- "An intangible entity to which we ascribe all that is good and right."

---

[1] Otto, p. 6.
[2] Otto, p. 6.

- "Holiness would have to deal with someone or something that is extremely important to us and our souls."

- "Holiness is, for me, the very rare feeling I get that I'm in the exact right spot, doing the exact right thing, for the exact right reason, and what I am doing – in that moment, no matter how big or small, insignificant or not – is contributing to the goodness of the world and mankind."

- "A moment where the mind and body react in the present – goosebumps, tears, hearing clearly and hopefully a moment you will probably remember for the rest of your life."

- "Holiness is the continual process and enduring possibility that we can become better and we can make the world better."

It seems from this sampling that everyone has a different understanding of what holiness means. Clearly I am not the first person to notice and want to address this problem. Barry Diamond, in the preface to his rabbinic thesis on holiness at HUC-JIR, says that his challenge was to find an adequate definition for holiness. Unfortunately, "after months of reading I found my level of confusion rising faster than my level of understanding. Furthermore, I found that the myriad of people who were invoking '*kedushah*' like a chant also had no clear understanding of what it meant. They realized that it was important and that it was related to God, but they simply were not able to articulate a definition."[3]

The problem of defining holiness is not limited to eager rabbinical students. One of the premier biblical scholars in the field, Baruch Levine, notes that "As a concept,

---

[3] Diamond, p. iii.

holiness relates to a complex of elusive phenomena that retain an aura of mystery and resist definition."[4] Another scholar, Dinah Minkoff, adds that "The problem with understanding *kedushah* in the Bible is not simply the inadequacy of the English translation 'holiness,' with its narrow implication of religion, reverence, ritual and prayer. Rather, it is in defining the term 'holiness' as a Jewish concept."[5]

The aura of mystery, of course, has not precluded inquiry by people from various disciplines: "Theologians seek to formulate the relationship between holiness and the 'nature' of God. Phenomenologists want to know more about human responses to the holy. Students of cult and ritual search for evidence bearing on forms of celebration and on the role of religious institutions in the life of a society. Historians of literature trace the transmission of themes and the modulation of concepts attributable to different schools of biblical writers."[6] And beyond the questions, there are many attempts to define *kedushah*. Minkoff says that "*Kedushah* is not the same as holiness. *Kedushah* is not limited to purity, ritual, or religion. Rather, it is the process of making all aspects of life, including the personal and social, answer to a higher ideal."[7] Unfortunately, this definition is vague and does not provide any concrete sense of the word. On the other extreme, Allen Grossman offers:

> Holiness is the uninterpretable *a priori* literal fact of being, the
> source of interpretation (precisely as the Holy One is the source
> of the world) in which interpretation, as the trace of autonomous
> human purpose, seeks to extinguish itself. In this sense, holiness
> makes war against culture – the making or imaging of anything
> that is not itself; and the Holy One, the Lord of Hosts, makes war
> as a master of a prior dispensation, the sacred order of existence

---

[4] Levine (1987), p. 241.
[5] Minkoff, p. 106.
[6] Levine (1987), p. 241.
[7] Minkoff, p. 111.

absolutely self-canonizing, intolerant of "discontent" that
produces the one real world as its only artifact.[8]

I would aver that most people would have no idea what that statement means. Rather than

defining the term, it obfuscates meaning and renders the term unintelligible.

Although Levine reassures us that "Hebrew *qodesh* most often connotes

something identifiable, even concrete,"[9] even he leaves us with an imprecise definition

that talks around holiness more than concretizing it:

> Holiness is difficult to define or to describe; it is a mysterious
> quality. Of what does holiness consist? In the simplest terms, the
> "holy" is different from the profane or the ordinary. It is "other,"
> as the phenomenologists define it. The "holy" is also powerful or
> numinous. The presence of holiness may inspire awe, or strike
> fear, evoke amazement. The holy may be perceived as dangerous,
> yet it is urgently desired because it affords blessing, power, and
> protection.[10]

In light of this broad-based ambiguity, while I concur with Otto's desire for

clarity about holiness, I disagree with his method. Rather than moving forward with a

new term (numinous, which he coined from the Latin *numen*), I prefer to look back to the

original source of our Jewish concept of holiness – the *Tanakh*.

Unfortunately, it turns out that the *Tanakh* does not provide an easy, monolithic

answer. It is important for us to recognize from the outset that "holiness" is an imperfect

translation for *qedushah*. The point of this examination is to arrive at a more complete

meaning. Still, for clarity and ease, within the confines of this paper, we will use

"holiness" as a functional approximation for *qedushah*. And as we work our way through

a number of analyses and biblical texts, I think we will find that holiness is a much more

complex, subtle, and, ultimately, accessible concept than we might think.

---

[8] Grossman, p. 392.
[9] Levine (1987), p. 250.
[10] Levine (1989), p. 256.

Chapter 2:
Classic scholarly definitions of holiness

In order to flesh out current thinking on the nature of holiness, it is first necessary

to survey the field to determine how scholars have understood *qedushah* in the *Tanakh*.

In moving from Otto and Helmer Ringgren through more recent scholars in Chapters

Two and Three, we will notice a number of theories and assumptions that may or may not

be well-supported in the *Tanakh* text. The aim of these initial chapters is not so much to

critique these formative views on holiness; rather, it is to present them so that we

understand where the field has been as we move into more recent and nuanced

interpretations. It is important to establish a baseline understanding of the scholarly

position on holiness before moving on to my own analysis. Although some of these

characterizations may be superseded later in this work, taken together they will provide a

foundation on which we can build a more concrete definition for *qedushah*.

Rudolf Otto

Any modern analysis of holiness is rooted in the work of Rudolf Otto. He defined

the field eighty years ago by recognizing the layered realities of religious experience:

"Religion is not exclusively contained and exhaustively comprised in any series of

'rational' assertions; and it is well worthwhile to attempt to bring the relation of the

different 'moments' of religion to one another clearly before the mind, so that its nature

may become more manifest."[11] Although it may seem obvious to us today, Otto broke

new ground by asserting that there was an emotional component to religious experience

to balance its intellectual side and that it needs to be taken seriously.

When searching for a definition of holiness, then, he understood that the Hebrew

qadosh connotes "good, absolute goodness, when, that is, the notion has ripened and

reached the highest stage in its development … but this 'holy' then represents the gradual

shaping and filling in with ethical meaning, or what we shall call the 'schematization', of

what was a unique original feeling-response, which can be in itself ethically neutral and

claims consideration in its own right."[12] As a result, he coined "numinous" as "a word to

stand for this element in isolation, the 'extra' in the meaning of 'holy' above and beyond

the meaning of goodness."[13] According to his definition, numinous includes a "creature-

feeling" which expresses "the note of self-abasement into nothingness before an

overpowering, absolute might of some kind; whereas everything turns upon the character

of this overpowering might, a character which cannot be expressed verbally, and can only

be suggested indirectly through the tone and content of a man's feeling-response to it.

And this response must be directly experienced in oneself to be understood."[14] In other

words, you can only understand "holy" by experiencing it! "The numinous is thus felt as

objective and outside the self."[15]

But what does it feel like to stand in the presence of the holy? This is the key to

Otto's theory, and so he coined another term to represent this feeling – *mysterium*

tremendum:

---

[11] Otto, p. 4.
[12] Otto, p. 6.
[13] Otto, pp. 6-7.
[14] Otto, p. 10.
[15] Otto, p. 11.

> Let us consider the deepest and most fundamental element in all strong and sincerely felt religious emotion .... [l]et us follow it up with every effort of sympathy and imaginative intuition wherever it is to be found, in the lives of those around us, in sudden, strong ebullitions of personal piety and the frames of mind such ebullitions evince, in the fixed and ordered solemnities of rites and liturgies, and again in the atmosphere that clings to old religious monuments and buildings, to temples and to churches. If we do so we shall find we are dealing with something for which there is only one appropriate expression, *mysterium tremendum*. The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship. It may pass over into a more set and lasting attitude of the soul, continuing, as it were, thrillingly vibrant and resonant, until at last it dies away and the soul resumes its "profane", non-religious mood of everyday experience. It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost grisly horror and shuddering. It has its crude, barbaric antecedents and early manifestations, and again it may be developed into something beautiful and pure and glorious. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of – whom or what? In the presence of that which is a Mystery inexpressible and above all creatures.[16]

Even this lyrical expression of religious emotion is not enough, however, and Otto adds

the notions of majesty and urgency to his definition of numinous. This provides the

feeling with elements such as "might, power, absolute overpoweringness ... [and]

symbolic expressions [such as] vitality, passion, emotion, temper, will, force, movement,

excitement, activity, violence."[17] The holy, then, is that which causes all of these

emotions to flower in a human being and lies "in a peculiar 'moment' of consciousness,

to wit, the stupor before something 'wholly other', whether such an other be named

'spirit' or 'daemon' or 'deva', or be left without any name."[18] According to Otto,

---

[16] Otto, pp. 12-13.
[17] Otto, pp. 20, 23.
[18] Otto, p. 27.

The capital instance of the intimate mutual interpenetration of the numinous with the rational and moral is Isaiah .... [i]t is in Isaiah that the expression "the Holy One of Israel" first becomes established as the expression, par excellence, for the deity, prevailing over all others by its mysterious potency ... in deutero-Isaiah, if in any writer, we have to do with a God whose attributes are clear to conceptual thought: omnipotence, goodness, wisdom, truth; and yet all the time these are attributes of "the Holy One," whose strange name deutero-Isaiah too repeats no less than fifteen times and always in passages where it has a special impressiveness. Related expressions akin to the "holiness" of Yahweh are His "fury", His "jealousy", His "wrath", the "consuming fire", and the like. The import of them all is not only the all-requiting righteousness of God, not even merely His susceptibility to strong and living emotions, but all this ever enclosed in and permeated with the "awefulness" and the "majesty", the "mystery" and the "augustness", of His non-rational divine nature.[19]

Otto's conceptualization of numinous does us a great service in the study of holiness. In defining the human response to the holy, he provides us a vocabulary with which to discuss the effect of holiness. He does not, however, define holiness itself in a concrete manner – at least not outside the casual definition of holiness as equivalent to the deity.

Diamond notes that "it is circular to argue that some undefinable experience is the basis for all notions of the holy."[20] And even though "God as 'wholly other is at the heart of Otto's conception of deity,"[21] Diamond argues that,

Otto totally disregards any sort of behavioral reaction to the holy. For Otto, there are no particular demands made upon a person who experiences the holy .... Otto simply ignores the demands which are the invariable result of an encounter with God ... one wonders how Otto understands the prohibition against eating the meat of certain sacrifices that have been sanctified, that is, that are holy. Is the meat having a numinous experience? Or does one have this experience when eating the meat? Does the property,

[19] Otto, p. 78.
[20] Diamond, p. 62.
[21] Diamond, p. 61.

when dedicated to the Temple, become holy? Do people make donations to the Temple because of a numinous experience? If that is the case, why is the object described as holy and not the giving?[22]

Insofar as the Bible connects Diamond's questions with the holy, the Jewish question about *qadosh* has to be explored further.

Helmer Ringgren

If we are to clarify an early modern definition for holiness, then, perhaps we should turn to Ringgren. In his seminal 1948 article, "The Prophetical Conception of Holiness," he provides as close to the classical academic definition of holiness as we are likely to find. He begins with a brief grammatical analysis, demonstrating that the various adjectival and verbal forms of the root *q.d.sh.* include "to be sanctified" (*nif*), "to consecrate or hallow" (*pi*), "to sanctify oneself" (*hitp*), and "holy" (*qadosh*). As a result of this, he concludes that

> The primary sense of the root *K.D.Sh.* is not quite clear. Baudissin, who wrote the first scientific monograph on the O.T. conception of holiness – which is still one of the best treatments of the subject – thought it was most probable that the root originally denoted a withdrawing, or a separation, from that which is profane – perhaps also with the secondary meaning of "exalted", when speaking of the deity. Other scholars have supported the original meaning "brilliant", "pure", but it seems impossible to produce a decisive argument for either of these two options.[23]

Although he admits that a definition is hard to come by, he does attempt to provide a functional meaning: "Who and what may be called holy? It may quite briefly

---

[22] Diamond, pp. 63-65.
[23] Ringgren, p. 4.

be answered thus: Holy is Yahweh and everything that stands in relation to Him in some way or other."[24] He justifies this by noting the general ways in which *Q.d.sh* is used in *Tanakh*:

> The name of Yahweh is holy (Ez. 36:20 ff., 39:7, cf. Lev. 20:3), likewise His word (Jer. 23:9). Heaven, where He lives, is holy (Is. 57:15, cf. Ps 20:7), and a host of holy angels are in His service (Zech. 14:5, cf. Dan. 8:13 etc). Furthermore, the place is holy, where Yahweh, or His angel, reveals Himself (Ex. 3:2-5, 19, Josh. 5:15, cf. Gen. 28:17, where the word "holy" is not expressly mentioned). The notion of holiness is also applied to everything that is connected with the cult. The temple is called Mikdash and Kodesh, and its two rooms "the Holy [place]" and "the Holy of Holies". Jerusalem where the sanctuary is situated is the holy city (Is. 52:1), Zion is the holy mountain (e.g. Is. 27:13, 56:7, 65:25). The sacrifices are holy (Jer 11:15, Hag. 2:12). The priests who perform the sacrificial acts shall be holy (Lev. 21:6-8), the same quality is ascribed to their clothes (Ez. 42:14, cf. Ex. 29:29) and to the objects used in the cult: "the ark, and the table, and the candlestick, and the altars and the holy vessels with which they minister" (Num. 3:31). Within the cult a difference is made between "holy" (kadosh, kodesh) and "most holy" (kodesh k'doshim). Very often we find the precept that certain ceremonies shall be performed in a holy place (Ex. 29:31, Lev. 6:9, 19 f.). There are also holy days and seasons: the Sabbath (Is. 58:13, Ez. 20:20, 44:24, Jer. 17:22 ff., cf. Gen. 2:3, Ex. 20:8), the annual festivals (Lev. 23), the year of the jubilee (Lev. 25:12). Certain persons are also endowed with a character of holiness. Elisha is said to be a holy man of God (2 Ki. 4:9), Jeremiah has been sanctified by Yahweh in the womb of his mother (Jer. 1:5). The n'zirim, who are consecrated to Yahweh shall be holy (Num. 6:5); furthermore, the soldiers sanctify themselves to Yahweh's war (Jer. 6:4, 51:27, Is. 13:3, cf. 1Sam. 21:4 f.). That which is by its nature the property of Yahweh is holy, e.g. the first-born (Ex. 13:12, Lev. 27:26) and the firstfruits of fields and vineyards (Lev. 19:24). Likewise everything that is given to Yahweh becomes holy (Lev. 27:9, 30). The people of Israel is denoted holy (Deut. 7:6, Ex. 19:6). Sometimes it is Yahweh's demand on Israel that she shall be holy (Lev. 11:44 f. and often). Once or twice also the country in which Israel lives is called the Holy Land (Ps. 78:54, Zech 2:16).[25]

---

[24] Ringgren, p. 7.
[25] Ringgren, pp. 7-8.

The most striking thing about his extensive list of biblical uses is that Ringgren finds no differentiation here. He reaches only two conclusions. First, "the notion of holiness is closely bound up with God, Yahweh. There are only a few cases, where the words 'holy' or 'sanctify' are used with reference to something that has no connection with Yahweh; but in all these cases it is a question of a god or something divine (Ez. 28:14, Is. 65:5, 2Ki. 10:20, cf. Is. 66:17, Ez. 28:18). Thus holiness always belongs to the divine sphere."[26] On the other hand, he realizes that "Holiness is very often bound up with the cult and is thus a cultic notion. This is easily understood if we remember that cult is the normal way of getting into contact with the divinity."[27] In a similar vein, Ringgren claims that no person or object possesses inherent holiness; instead, they become holy only based on their relationship to God. In fact, "if the term holy was originally used only about that which belongs to the deity, it is difficult to see how it came to denote the deity itself. It is easier to understand the evolution in the opposite direction ... and if we look at the O.T. texts we shall find that the deity is the primary factor in holiness .... [t]his is the case with everything that is holy or sanctified. It is not divine, but it becomes holy by the relation to the divinity in which it is placed."[28] Furthermore, "God is holy always and for ever, but persons and things may lose their holiness."[29]

Unlike Otto, Ringgren recognizes that the holy makes certain demands on human actions: "What is holy must not be approached. It is inviolable. It is even dangerous to touch it without taking the necessary precautions .... [t]hat which is holy is also dreadful

---

[26] Ringgren, p. 8.
[27] Ringgren, p. 8.
[28] Ringgren, p. 9.
[29] Ringgren, p. 9.

and terrible; 'holy and terrible is Thy name' (Ps. 111:9)."[30] Just as importantly, "that

which is holy should be handled in the right way and he who approaches it should be well

prepared to do so (2Sam. 6)."[31]

Ringgren also describes the manner in which non-holy objects can become holy:

"Yahweh is holy; when something is given to Him, it is brought into the divine sphere

and becomes holy ... thus *K.d.sh.* is to consecrate, or to devote something to Yahweh."[32]

However, he still portrays a simplistic understanding of the nature of holiness as a force:

> There are indeed some instances that seem to indicate that
> holiness is an impersonal power that is transmitted in a
> mechanical way by contact ... in the earlier texts we do not find
> this mechanical conception of holiness. Whoever touches a holy
> thing shall die. The dynamic force of holiness is here more
> prominent; in the later texts a systematization has taken place,
> even showing certain features of a magical character. If holiness
> is considered a force it must in any case be stressed that it is the
> divine force. It is not persons and things as such that have been
> filled with a powerful fluidum, but they have been brought into
> the sphere of the activity of the divine power.[33]

Barry Diamond

In his rabbinic thesis on "The Biblical View of Purity and Holiness," Barry

Diamond builds on the theories of three classical thinkers – Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade,

and Quentin Smith – to argue that "holiness is a term that designates something as being

of ultimate (Godly) significance. Its significance is derived from its being consistent with

the physical, social, temporal and spatial order of the universe as ordained by God."[34]

---

[30] Ringgren, p. 10.
[31] Ringgren, p. 10.
[32] Ringgren, p. 11.
[33] Ringgren, p. 14.
[34] Diamond, Abstract.

We already noted Diamond's critique of Otto – although foundational, Otto deals with purely emotional and intellectual responses, not real-world actions. Nonetheless, his model is helpful in understanding what people are responding to in the holy. On the other hand, the "dialectic between profane and sacred forms the basis of Eliade's thought ....[u]ltimately, the sacred is the coincidence of being and non-being, absolute and relative, temporal and eternal, wholly other and its opposite ... [he focuses] on humanity's natural tendency to experience the holy through patterned, oppositional structure."[35] His is a dualistic response, in which "profane space is homogeneous, without particular meaning while sacred space is the point at which reality can be perceived. It is often depicted as the Center of the world or the navel which was either the beginning point of creation or the point of nexus between humanity and God."[36] Although interesting, these polarities need not be imposed upon *qedushah.*

Lastly for Diamond,

> Quentin Smith ["An Analysis of Holiness," Religious Studies 24, num. 4, 1988)] argues that holiness can be understood outside of its religious association, as a general abstract concept which does not necessitate positing the existence of a deity .... [h]e dismisses the Ottoian view that holiness cannot be analyzed because of its inherent "otherness" .... [h]oliness, for Smith, "is an evocative designation of an intuitively felt property of an item, and ... the analogical and decompositional analysis of this evocative designation represents (to different degrees) precise explications of the phenomenon evoked" .... [h]oliness is the non-technical way we describe a phenomenon each of which is supreme of the highest possible order of its class and composed of a number of sub-elements. Smith intuitively delineates four different classes of phenomena which can have a supreme model: persons, moral phenomena, cherished phenomena and existence. These, he argues, are classes of phenomena which are already of a higher order than the other classes. Moral perfection, for instance, is of a

---

[35] Diamond, pp. 65-66.
[36] Diamond, p. 67.

higher class than mechanical perfection. Only when something is
supreme in these categories may it be called holy.[37]

Taking all of this together, Diamond builds his case for a classical understanding of *Qedushah* in the *Tanakh*. On one level, he believes that "the meaning of k-d-sh as 'deity' is clearly attested in the Bible, but this may be derivative from one of the other meanings. It may also reflect ... the understanding of YHWH as being the exclusive god of the Israelite people. Therefore, God (usually YHWH) being the *kadosh* of Israel, may mean that Israel may have an exclusive relationship with YHWH."[38] In a similar sense, he argues that "just as the purity system grew out of the creation of the world and taught Israel how to exist within the God-created order, holiness is the mode for a God-created people to relate to God. The central purpose of the cult was to be able to approach God and bring a sacrifice to maintain or repair the relationship between themselves and God."[39] Perhaps holiness is more broad than simply relating directly to God. Diamond also realized that "One of the most common definitions of holiness in scholarly literature is that it is a characteristic of God. Usually basing their claims on Leviticus 19:2 ... scholars describe holiness as an attempt at *imitatio dei*."[40]

But holiness is more than simply God, or aspects of our exclusive relationship with God. Diamond also brings forth a classic definitional approach to holiness, namely, that "Israel's holiness consisted fundamentally in her having been set apart to the specific purpose of God in the world."[41] More than just Israel,

A divinely distinguished temporal order is described as being
holy to God. At that point, God set a mark of holiness which

---

[37] Diamond, pp. 71-72.
[38] Diamond, pp. 80-81.
[39] Diamond, p. 86.
[40] Diamond, p. 94
[41] Diamond, p. 89.

distinguishes this day from the previous days in which creation (the making of divisions) was taking place. Holiness is a mark of distinction, a *hechsher* (a symbol of something that is fit) which designates the object, person, place or time as meeting the idea. In the case of Shabbat, God marked a day in which all distinctions ceased. Creation was said to be "very good." For something to become holy it must correspond to the order of God's creation and contain no new creations, no hybrids, no animals; everything must be exactly as God intended. Only then may an object, person, place, time, be distinguished by God as corresponding to God's will .... [p]urity is always a prerequisite for holiness. Something which is pure may be set in a special exclusive relationship to God and, therefore, benefit from God's power. When something is set in this exclusive relationship, it is called holy, that is, God claims exclusive rights to and approval of this thing.[42]

Holiness also has certain qualities. For example, Diamond notes that holiness often has the quality of transmutability. In other words, when a person touches a holy object, "the person or object will, itself become sanctified to God. This is based mainly upon the verse, *kol hanogea bam, yikdash* (Ex 29:37; 30:29 Lev 6:11, 20)."[43] Although this characteristic of holiness seems clear, he wonders whether "this mean[s] that one who touches these objects becomes holy by virtue of the touching, or does this require that any or all people and objects which come into contact with these items must already be holy? The former interpretation presumes the contagiousness of holiness. There is little or no clear evidence to support this position."[44]

Diamond raises a number of important questions regarding the nature of holiness, but his use of Otto, Eliade, and Smith leaves us wanting for more evidence and analysis.

---

[42] Diamond, pp. 90-91.
[43] Diamond, p. 99.
[44] Diamond, p. 99.

Other modern thinkers

Even as Diamond's work synthesizes the opinions of several earlier scholars, a

number of more recent scholars have continued to search for a definition of holiness,

while maintaining a close affiliation with some of the earlier notions found in Otto,

Ringgren, and Diamond. For example, Alan Grossman departs only slightly from

Ringgren's notion about holiness and God when he states that

> Holiness, in Hebrew, *kodesh*, indicates the highest value, or –
> more precisely – what can be said by men (or angels) when God
> immediately comes to mind, as in Isaiah 6:3: "Holy, holy, holy is
> the Lord of hosts." Holiness is the word by which men describe
> God and therefore the ultimate doxological predicate, because it
> is the word by which God describes himself. "You shall be holy,
> for I, the Lord your God, am holy" (Lev 19:2). Hence, holiness is
> the abstract term taught man by God to mark God's difference
> and the nature of everything that comes to be included (obedient
> to the absolute imperative implicit in the idea of "highest value")
> within this difference.[45]

Interestingly, Grossman also points out a fundamental difference in the first two

books of the Bible. Since the word "good" is characteristic of Genesis (holiness appears

only once, at the institution of the Sabbath) and the word "holy" is more characteristic of

Exodus, "the transactions of holiness in Exodus mark the beginning of religion, by

contrast to the heroic relation to God prior to religion that is the principle of transaction in

Genesis."[46] It should be apparent that God and humanity occupied the same realm

throughout Genesis; nonetheless, those transactions are not labeled holy. While this could

have led Grossman to question more deeply the nature of holiness, he merely notes it in

describing Exodus as a book more based on holiness.

---

[45] Grossman, p. 389.
[46] Grossman, p. 392.

Diamond noticed this difference, as well:

> The biblical system of holiness clearly suggests that interaction
> between Israel (perhaps humanity in general) and God must take
> place through a specific set of social relations: the social
> organization of the Temple Cult and priestly class. However, this
> was not always the case. The term holiness is hardly used in the
> Book of Genesis, although our ancestors regularly communicated
> with God and generally had a positive relationship. However,
> after the experience of servitude in Egypt and the creation of the
> People of Israel at Mount Sinai, a formal system of interaction
> was established.[47]

Like Grossman, he fails to follow through with the potential meaning behind the

fact that God's early relationships are not called holy. In addition, he lumps all of

holiness into the realm of the cult without seeming to realize that there exist entirely

different bases for holiness within *Tanakh* (which we shall explore in a later chapter).

Steven Steinbock continues the theme of holiness being somehow associated with

God when he states that "'Holy' is the standard English translation of *kadosh* and is

commonly used as an adjective to describe God, as well as places, objects, and people

associated with God."[48] And he falls in line with grammatical definition that "*K'dushah*

[means] Holiness. Set apart, consecrated, separate. Refers to places, people, and things

dedicated to God."[49]

Allen Ross takes the idea just a bit further as he intimates that "the exhortations to

holiness [in Leviticus] showed how every aspect of the life of the covenant people had to

be set apart to God."[50] The most obvious example of this was the way "the [sacred]

priests were set apart to their service through an elaborate consecration .... [t]he parallels

between Israel's priesthood and those of the ancient world are obvious. God was using

---

[47] Diamond, pp. 85-86.
[48] Steinbock, p. 127.
[49] Steinbock, p. 127.
[50] Ross, p. 21.

customary institutions for the ministry in his sanctuary, because the whole idea of

priesthood signified that consecrated mediation was required to enable the people to have

genuine access to the Holy One."[51] In fact, Ross states emphatically that

> The holiness of God is undoubtedly the main emphasis of the
> Book of Leviticus .... [t]he idea of the holiness of God is
> understood from the outset by God's prohibiting from his
> presence every sinful and diseased person or thing – they were
> simply incompatible with the holy Lord God. He also demanded
> that potential worshipers be made holy by elaborate sacrificial
> rituals before they could enter the divine presence ... He
> demanded that Israel be set apart to his holy law and not live like
> the nations of the world. From beginning to end, this book
> reminds people that God is holy and that his holiness is the
> standard.[52]

This idea that God is holy is a fundamental feature of many of these scholars'

approaches to holiness. Ross notes further that it was not only a question of God's

holiness, however, since "under the law everything was classified according to the

categories of holy or unholy, with only the holy being permitted in the presence of

God."[53]

In a very different sense, Ross reminds us that "Milgrom (731) says, 'Holiness

means *imitatio Dei* – the life of godliness.'"[54] In this sense, many human actions become

a question of holiness as we attempt to imitate God's holiness, and perhaps to assert our

separateness. The dietary laws, for example, stemmed from the distinctions among

animals that were set up from the time of creation, and allowed us to mimic God by

"living according to the design of the Creator of all life."[55] In fact, Leviticus is very clear

about this emphasis on holiness through imitation when it says, "'God has redeemed his

---

[51] Ross, pp. 32-33.
[52] Ross, pp. 44-45.
[53] Ross, p. 243.
[54] Ross, p. 255.
[55] Ross, p. 255.

people' (11:45a); 'God, who redeemed his people, is holy' (11:45b); 'God, who is holy, demands that his people imitate his holiness.' (11:46-47)"[56]

According to Ross, if we are to imitate God's holiness, we must focus on the highest elements of God. For example, "bodily diseases are incompatible with the holy presence of the Lord ... normal illness and disease are here symptoms of our earthiness, our human frailty."[57] Similarly,

> Decay or corruption is incompatible with the holiness of the Lord and must be removed .... [t]he theme of the holiness of God and its incompatibility with things physical and earthy continues in Lev. 15 with very personal matters: chronic infections, seminal discharges, menstruation, and bodily emissions. Such conditions rendered people unclean .... because bodily functions are incompatible with the holiness of God, purification and sanctification are absolutely essential before entering the presence of God. God was teaching the household of faith the distinction between the physical and the holy. Anything connected with sexual function was part of the physical world; it was categorized as common, not holy.[58]

Helen Freeman provides further support for the idea of separateness when she writes, "The concept of holiness, *K'dushah*, implies separation, withdrawal, apartness ... a detailed examination of the use of the rood K.D.Sh in the Hebrew bible makes it clear that the meaning implies set apart, consecrated, dedicated, rather than perfect in and of itself."[59] And Eyal Regev falls in line with the idea of distinguishing by offering, "Obviously, the meaning of 'sanctified' (*qiddes*) is to distinguish, designate, dedicate etc. When something is sanctified, it is owned by God or close to Him. The holiness of the

---

[56] Ross, p. 260.
[57] Ross, p. 282.
[58] Ross, pp. 297, 304, 311.
[59] Freeman, p. 58.

people of Israel as well as the holiness of the tabernacle is thus an implication of their relationship with God."[60]

Lastly, Baruch Levine, one of the foremost biblical scholars and leading experts on Leviticus, brings up a number of variations to some of the themes we have already explored. To begin with, he believes that

> The words of Leviticus 19:2 pose a serious theological problem, especially the second part of the statement: "For I, the Lord your God, am holy." Does this mean that holiness is part of the nature of God? Does it mean that holiness originates from Him? In the Jewish tradition, the predominant view has been that this statement was not intended to describe god's essential nature, but, rather, His manifest, or "active," attributes. To say that God is "holy" is similar to saying that He is great, powerful, merciful, just, wise, and so forth ... the statement that God is holy means, in effect, that He acts in holy ways: He is just and righteous. Although this interpretation derives from later Jewish tradition, it seems to approximate both the priestly and the prophetic biblical conceptions of holiness.[61]

Minkoff concurs that "holiness is not God's 'nature' but describes His action. Attributes like holy, merciful and just are associated with God on the basis of His observable actions."[62]

Levine also takes a broader approach to who, exactly, may attain holiness: "This objective [of preserving distinctiveness from other peoples] is epitomized in the statement of Exodus 19:6: 'you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' This statement also conveys the idea, basic to biblical religion, that holiness cannot be achieved by individuals alone, no matter how elevated, pure, or righteous. It can be realized only through the life of the community, acting together."[63] In other words,

---

[60] Regev, p. 252.
[61] Levine (1989), p. 256.
[62] Minkoff, p. 109.
[63] Levine (1989), p. 256.

"holiness was to be realized, as an objective of the religious life, through the historic unfolding of Israel's collective experience."[64] Levine's claim that holiness may be achieved by community, not individuals, is an important element in our understanding of holiness, and one which we will pick up on later.

Furthermore, Levine is not as quick as some scholars to accept the idea that holiness is contagious, or transferable among objects and people:

> To protect what is holy requires that the clergy be consecrated, because to handle sacred objects or stand in holy places one must be holy. This is expressed in Exodus 29:37 (cf. 30:29) where we find a basic regulation relevant to the sanctuary altar: "Whoever comes in contact (*ha-nogea*) with the altar *must be in a holy state* (*yiqdash*)" .... it is assumed that the governing concern is with protecting the altar from defilement; only a consecrated person, a priest, may have contact with it. Others have interpreted this verse as expressing a result: "Whoever comes in contact with the altar will become holy" .... [t]his interpretation is unlikely, and there is actually little evidence for the theory of contagious holiness .... [i]n Ex. 29:21 we read that upon his consecration Aaron "became holy" (*weqadesh*), and this was true of his vestments and those of his sons. This does not, however, indicate contagion! In fact, there is an instance where *qadash* clearly means "to become holy," and yet the context demonstrates that sanctity is not transferable through physical contact alone. In Haggai 2:11-13 .... [t]he point of this dialogue is that holiness can be lost more easily than it can be acquired.[65]

Analysis

A wide range of scholars over the past century have brought the academic process to bear on the meaning of holiness in the Bible. Their efforts have laid a strong foundation of ideas that, for a time, were accepted as essentially valid. Otto's description of a numinous experience was groundbreaking, and Ringgren analyzed the text in a

---

[64] Levine (1987), p. 254.
[65] Levine (1987), pp. 246-7.

scientific (though not complete) manner. At the same time, there are many discrepancies both between these theories and between the theories and the text, and they raise a number of questions which need to be addressed further. For example, one might wonder whether there is a simple duality between the holiness of God (and godly concerns) and humanity (and human concerns). Is it too simplistic to assert that godly is holy while human is not holy? Is holiness, as Ringgren intimates, merely related either to God or the cult? Several scholars build on the general idea of holiness meaning separation, but slip into using the term interchangeably with others. Is differentiation the same as separation? Is distinctness the same as separation? Is purification the same as sanctification? Does access (of the priests to God) mean separation? Is holiness contagious?

In the past 20 years or so, as scholars have continued their work, they have begun to address some of these dilemmas and shortcomings. Their ideas have expanded our understanding into areas beyond God and the cult, while narrowing its focus into more specific descriptions. Before entering into an explanation of several of these ideas, however, it is necessary to take a step back and look at the cultural and etymological roots of the *qedushah* and determine exactly how it was used in the Bible.

Chapter 3:
Biblical and Cultural Roots

It should be clear from the sheer volume of scholarly attempts to define *qedushah* that "the etymology of the root *qds* and its derivative is still unresolved."[66] One of the reasons it is so difficult to find an adequate definition for holiness is that "*qds* has no synonyms."[67] Levine reminds us that "the Semitic root *q-d-sh* has a history which considerably antedates the biblical period. Most significant are cognates in Akkadian and Ugaritic ... [and] the etymology of *q-d-sh* remains uncertain."[68] Even if all this is true, the linguistic and cultural connections will add to our foundational understanding of what the *Tanakh* meant in its use of *q.d.sh.*

History of the root *q.d.sh* in different languages

Given the fact that our biblical ancestors lived in a region with various competing and partnering tribes, it is not surprising to learn that many elements of Hebrew have both roots and cognates in other languages. Specifically, there are many precursors to our use of *q.d.sh* which appear throughout the Ancient Near East.

Ringgren, as we by now should expect, provides us with a brief survey of the uses of *q.d.sh* in several Semitic languages:

> The other Semitic languages give no definite guidance to the
> solution of the problem. In the *Ras Shamra* texts we find *Kds* as
> the name of a deity; *bn kds*, "son of holiness", is an epithet of

---

[66] Kornfeld, p. 523.
[67] Kornfeld, p. 527.
[68] Levine (1987), p. 242.

Dan'el (II D I 11.4, 9); *Keret* is called *bn Ltpn wkds*, "son of *Latpan*, and a sacred being" (III K I – II 1.11). In I K 1. 197 kds denotes the sanctuary of Athirat; and on a small tablet *kdsm* seems to be a designation for a class of priests. In Phoenician *K.d.sh* is used as an epithet of the gods; in the causative form the verb is used about the consecration of an altar. In Punic *K.d.m.t K.d.sh.t* is "holy first fruit". Some other similar examples only show that the word here had much the same meaning as in Hebrew, and was used in the same cases. In Palmyrenian inscriptions *A.k.d.sh* is "to consecrate, dedicate". There are four instances of the Arabic verb in the Koran, three of them in the pass. Part. Twice (20:12, 79:16) it is used about the sacred valley where Moses saw the burning bush, the third instance speaks of Canaan as the holy land. The commentary of Baidawi explains the passage 20:12 in the following way: Moses is ordered to take off his shoes, because they are dirty and the valley is called sacred in order to enforce its venerability. For the word "sacred" comprises both meanings, i.e. purity and veneration .... [i]n Ethiopic it means "to declare holy, to sanctify, to consecrate" .... the use of the word is clearly influenced by Biblical language; perhaps it is an Aramaic loan-word. In Accadian the root k.d.s is not very common. According the Bezold, the verb kadasu is used about a god in the meaning "to be terrible", in I:2 it means "to purity, sanctify, consecrate". The adjective kuddusu is used in parallelism with ellu and ebbu, and consequently it seems to mean " bright, shining, pure". Brightness seems to have been a constitutive idea in the Accadian conception of holiness .... [t]his investigation proves that the idea of withdrawal, or separation, is not always very prominent; the meaning "pure" also deserves attention, though it is derived by Arabian lexicographers from the sense first mentioned, and in Arabic it may be due to Christian or Jewish influence.[69]

Unfortunately, as is also typical, Ringgren does not provide much analysis with his survey. As a result, we must turn to other scholars to help us fill in some of the details. Levine takes us back to some of the earliest usages, and explicates the different ways in which the root was used:

The Akkadian verb *qadashu* is only one of the equivalents listed for Sumerian UD [which is the usual comparison in Mesopotamian lexical texts], a word which exhibits broad semantic range. Other Akkadian equivalents of UD include *ellu*,

---

[69] Ringgren, pp. 4-6.

"pure, clean, clear," *ebbu*, "clean," and *namru*, "bright" .... [t]he word UD also has as an equivalent Akkadian *urru*, "light, daylight," as well as *umu*, "day, daytime." .... The intensive form of the Akkadian verb is *quddushu*, "to purify, consecrate," and normally describes the processes of ritual and magical sanctification. These did not differ in procedure from similar rites performed within the Israelite cult and conveyed by the cognate Hebrew form, *qiddesh*. Sanctification was accomplished by means of sacrifice, unction, the recitation of prayers and incantations, and by the investiture of priests, the dedications of statues, etc. In short, Akkadian *quddushu* describes the whole array of activities usually connected with the attribute of holiness.[70]

Although Levine finds great similarities between the typical Priestly usage of holiness and earlier sources, he also notes that Akkadian presents *q.d.sh* in a different sense:

The general impression is that the attested forms of Akkadian *qadashu* connote effects or processes. They describe the brilliance or aura surrounding gods and kings, or characterize processes relevant to cleansing and purification. These forms do not signify an inherent *mana*. This is an important point, because further on we will have occasion to suggest that monotheistic writers in ancient Israel found the root *q-d-sh* particularly appropriate for characterizing the God of Israel, for the very reason, perhaps, that it did not inevitably denote physical properties.[71]

Aside from these earliest roots, we find similar uses in Ugaritic and other Western Semitic languages:

All the *qds* derivatives [in Ugaritic] occur without question in religious contexts, including ritual instructions and mythological texts. The term *qds* is used to describe the gods themselves as well as everything associated more intimately with them, belonging to them in nature, or consecrated and thus associated with them by human beings .... [t]he expression *bn qds* refers primarily to members of the heavenly assembly and can be translated as "son of holiness," "son of the gods," or simply "gods," "holy ones" .... [t]he term *qdsm* refers to a priestly class,

---

[70] Levine (1987), p. 242.
[71] Levine (1987), pp. 242-3.

more specifically to the cultic servants supporting the priests in the temple …. [t]he term *qds* describes Ba'al's voice, i.e., thunder as an expression of divine power; it also describes the cup, *ks qds*, reserved for the gods, and the citadel, *hlm qds* …. [f]inally *qds* frequently refers to a sanctuary, the locus of encounter between gods and human beings, often as the preformative construction *mqdst* …. In West Semitic inscriptions *qds* as a verb means "consecrate" or "consecrate oneself", though not "clean, purify" as in Akkadian texts. One consecrated oneself to the deity, animals, or objects. One could also, however, consecrate or dedicate things to other persons, particularly graves to descendants.[72]

In addition to the fact that "the root *k-d-sh* is attested to in Phoenician, Akkadian, Old Babylonian, Ugaritic, Arabic, and Ethiopic"[73] in a cultic sense and also with meanings related to separation and shining, we find that

There is a whole class of meanings for *k-d-sh* related to professional titles, especially of priests and priestesses. In Ugaritic administrative lists, *k-d-sh-m* had the sense of "priest or cultic servitor." In Old Babylonian, *kadishtu* (Heb. *kedesha*) is a class of priestess. However, the same term in Akkadian and Hebrew signifies a prostitute; this may have become an epithet deriving from the role of a priestess in orgiastic rites of fertility cults. [Levine, *Kedusha* in Encyclopedia Judaica] Later, the meaning seems to have been expanded to divine beings, holy persons, sacred places, cultic objects, rites and celebrations. In Ugaritic m-k-d-sh-t has the same sense of the Hebrew word *mikdash*, that is, tabernacle or temple, while *k-d-sh-t* means "goddess" or "holy one." This is attested to in Hebrew where *k-d-sh* is in poetic parallelism with the word *el*, "deity." Thus, the appellation "Kadosh Yisrael" may mean "deity of Israel." Unfortunately, the usage of k-d-sh referring to place, person or object does not help us to uncover its etymology, since they are both "set apart" and "pure, clean."[74]

---

[72] Kornfeld, pp. 524-5.
[73] Diamond, p. 78.
[74] Diamond, pp. 79-80.

The idea of holiness from other cultures

Besides the purely linguistic roots for *q.d.sh* that we find in other languages, some of the basic concepts that our biblical writers may have incorporated into their ideas about holiness appeared earlier in other cultures. Robertson Smith's early monograph, *Lectures on the religion of the Semites* (1889) spurred the idea that the biblical ideas of "holiness" and "uncleanness" grew out of "a primitive conception of taboo. Taboo is that which is loaded with force, that in which there is *mana*. Belief in gods has developed out of the idea of *mana*, the mysterious power, and the notion of holiness out of taboo, though there are also survivals of old taboo prescriptions in the conception of uncleanness."[75] At the same time, the fact that holiness is so often bound up with God prevents us from declaring it a direct outgrowth of taboo. There are, however, much closer comparisons from the region.

Ross notes that in many ancient cultures people set apart community property for religious use, and these areas of worship were often considered holy. These sacred spaces "separated what was considered common or profane (outside the perimeter) from the holy shrine itself. Religious people believed that the mysterious presence of their deity dwelling among them required space in order to safeguard against encroachment."[76] This concept seems to fit well with some of the scholarly ideas presented earlier. Moreover, these

> Holy places were not arbitrarily chosen. They were places where
> people believed that the deity was present or could be found.
> They were usually places where a religious experience had been
> reported or the deity had been manifested .... [i]n antiquity high

---

[75] Ringgren, p. 3.
[76] Ross, p. 22.

places and mountains provided fitting locations for shrines because they elevated the ritual from the earth to the heavens, to the dwelling of God or gods .... Babylonian deities assembled on a holy mountain to fix destinies ... Mount Lebanon and Mount Sirion were known as holy mountains from Canaanite and Hittite times .... For Israel what made these mountains truly holy was the presence of the living God, first at Sinai in the making of the covenant, and then on Zion in taking up residence among his people. To his holy mountain the people went to worship with sacrifices and offerings; and at that holy hill they saw the evidence of his power and glory (Ps. 42:4; 63:2).[77]

And just as the *Miqdash* was the center of much biblical holiness, other cultures built sanctuaries and shrines in the lofty regions of their lands:

Old Mesopotamian temples were built on high terraces shaped like pyramids, which eventually took the shape of the many-storied ziggurat of Babylonian architecture ... those temples were the actual buildings where all the worship and ritual took place. In ancient Mesopotamia they were often built in the pattern of large houses, providing the places where the gods "resided" ... priests alone could enter the holy rooms to serve the deities .... It should come as no surprise that the Israelite tabernacle and later temple were constructed with similar features. The tabernacle stood within a protective courtyard; inside was the holy place, and behind that was the most holy place .... [t]he living God manifested his presence in the innermost holy room where his glory dwelled, covered by the tent and veiled by the curtain.[78]

Etymology

When we finally begin talk about the etymology of the Hebrew root *q.d.sh*, then, we must consider cultural, historical, and linguistic background. Hebrew, while similar, is a different language, and biblical society was a different culture from those surrounding it. Jacob Milgrom notes that *Tum'a* and *qedusha* (impurity and holiness) are semantic opposites. Since "*qedusha* resides with God, it is imperative for Israel to control

---

[77] Ross, pp. 22-24.
[78] Ross, pp. 24-25.

the occurrence of impurity lest it impinge on the realm of the holy God. The forces pitted

against each other in the cosmic struggle are no longer the benevolent and demonic

deities that populate the mythologies of Israel's neighbors but the forces of life and death

set loose by humans themselves through their obedience to or defiance of God's

commandments."[79] Whereas some the ideas and language may have similar roots, the fact

is that the biblical outlook was different than its neighbors.

Baruch Schwartz picks up on one of our primary difficulties when he says that

"the discussion of sanctity or holiness in the Bible is liable to fall into the trap of

supposing that the English synonyms 'sacred' and 'holy', and their equivalent terms in

other Western languages, are translations of Hebrew terms that convey the same idea."[80]

In other words, the way we use a word like "holiness" may not connect directly to the

Hebrew *qedushah* that we are attempting to translate. In fact, Schwartz argues that there

are two distinct meanings for *q.d.sh.* in *Tanakh* and that this reflects two distinct

etymological paths. He calls the two roots "*qds* I" and "*qds* II" and gives one a relational

definition, with the second getting an ontological one:

> The first and more familiar of the two has the sense of
> "separated," "belonging to," "designated for." It is this use which
> is approximated by the terms "holy" and "sacred" and their
> synonyms and derivatives .... [t]he second meaning for *qds* is
> "clean," "purified". This is less common but by no means rare. It
> occurs a bit less in early texts and becomes somewhat more
> widespread in later ones .... wherever the root *qds* occurs in this
> sense its meaning is unmistakable; it refers to washing,
> laundering and refraining from sexual activity in order to achieve
> a state of bodily cleanness, and by extension to the removal of
> idolatrous objects metaphorically thought of as "pollutants" in
> order to "purify" the Temple and its precincts .... the acts of
> purification it includes do not consecrate, that is they do not
> confer any lasting status of belonging to the divine sphere. Thus,

---

[79] Milgrom (2000), p. 32.
[80] Schwartz, p. 47.

texts in which *qds* II appears have nothing whatsoever to do with the discussion of what is approximately translated by "holy" or "sacred".[81]

Schwartz identifies another difficulty, namely that when we used terms like "sacred" and "holy" in Western languages, we always use them to express value. Something holy is "better" than something which is not, and it is generally "thought of as pertaining to that which is of the highest ethical or moral order or possessing supreme religious importance. In particular, holy persons are distinguished by the greatest possible piety or ethical standards. As used in the Hebrew Bible, on the other hand, the root *qds* does not convey any value judgment at all."[82]

As stated previously, a definitive etymology for *q.d.sh* remains elusive, and even controversial within the field. As just one example,

> Interpreters have not accepted Luzzato's suggestion that *qds* might be a combination of *yqd* ("burn") and *'es* ("fire") such that *yequd 'esh* ("burned in fire") might originally have referred to the burnt offering and subsequently to anything consecrated to the glorification of God. By contrast most interpreters concur with Baudissin's thesis that the likely presence of biconsonantal root forms prompts us to understand the *qd* in *qds* as having the basic meaning "separate, sunder," analogous to *hd* in *hds*, "new" in the sense of "separated from the old." Although this thesis seems to support linguistically the widespread view that *qds* means "separated, isolated, different from the surroundings," some scholars raised objections. The notion of "separating" is attested largely by *pr*-constructions; an original meaning of "separated" for *qds* would then be only a derived one.[83]

Not surprisingly, it seems that the most promising route for discerning an adequate biblical definition for holiness will be to analyze its use within the text itself, while keeping the various suggestions in mind.

---

[81] Schwartz, pp. 47-48.
[82] Schwartz, p. 49.
[83] Kornfeld, p. 523.

Where does *q.d.sh* show up in *Tanakh*?

Even Ringgren noticed that "the most numerous instances [of the words for 'holy' or 'holiness' can be found] in the collections of laws – esp. the cult legislation – and in two prophetic books, viz. Isaiah and Ezekiel. In Gen. the root *k.d.sh* is used only once (2:3), nor is the notion of holiness – as is natural – very frequent in the other narrative literature of the OT."[84] According to W. Kornfeld, writing in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*,

> Muller lists the distribution of the 842 occurrences of the Heb.
> Root *qds* in the OT. Significant concentrations are found in the
> books of Leviticus (152), Ezekiel (105), and Exodus (102),
> followed by Numbers (80), Isaiah (73), and Psalms (65). It occurs
> 48 times in the Dtr History but then 120 times in the Chronicler's
> History, including 60 in 2Chronicles alone. The root does not
> occur in Nahum, Ruth, Canticles, and Esther. Strikingly,
> Jeremiah does not use the root very often (only 19 times), nor
> does wisdom literature at large (5 in Job, 3 in Proverbs, 1 in
> Ecclesiastes). The Aram. *qaddis*, "holy, sacred," occurs 13 times,
> but only in the Aramaic portions of Daniel.[85]

And while we have noted that there are no direct synonyms for *q.d.sh*, "roughly synonymous Hebrew roots include *bdl*, 'to divide'; *hnk*, 'to dedicate'; *hrm*, 'severely dedicate; put under ban'; *rwn*, 'contribute, devote'; *nzr*, 'separate, consecrate'"[86] Although this analysis does not discuss antonyms, contrasts to *q.d.sh.* will be addressed later in this work.

---

[84] Ringgren, pp. 6-7.
[85] Kornfeld, p. 527.
[86] Wright, p. 237.

Kornfeld and Ringgren approach the uses of *q.d.sh* based on which text they

appear in and demonstrate briefly how different texts within *Tanakh* use *q.d.sh*. Although

there is no consensus regarding exactly which texts belong to which element in the

Documentary Hypothesis, many scholars rely on this as a generally-accepted (if debated

in the details) and effective way to break up the text. Less contentious would be to merely

refer to each text within *Tanakh* as having its own integrity – no one can debate that

Leviticus or Isaiah, for example, have been passed down within *Tanakh* as complete units

by whatever redactor was at work in crafting the final flow of the text. Nonetheless, it is

not my intention here to address the debate about which texts may belong to which

writer(s); rather, my goal is to present one idea of how holiness is distributed throughout

various elements in the text so that we can add this analysis to our basic understanding of

how *q.d.sh.* is used in *Tanakh*.[87]

<u>J</u>
- J texts prior to the revelation to Moses in Ex. 3 avoid all *qds* derivatives.

  Although these texts maintain *qades* as a place-name (Gen. 14:7; 16:14; 20:1),

  they use it to refer neither to sacrificial offerings (4:3-5; 8:20; 22:2) nor to places

  where the patriarchs encountered God (12:6; 21:33). Gen. 28:17 does not

  constitute an exception, since after dreaming of the heavenly ladder Jacob calls

  the place *"nora"*, "awesome," but not *qados* .... [o]nly in Gen. 38:6-24 does J use

---

[87] This entire section represents the work of Kornfeld (J texts) and Ringgren (beginning with E, D, and Dtr History texts and continuing through the end) in the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, pp. 529-542.

a *qds* derivative to describe Judah's daughter-in-law as *qedesa*, "consecrated" (vv. 21-22), albeit without ascribing to her any religious consecration .... J uses a *qds* derivative for the first time in Ex. 3:5 to qualify something as "holy/consecrated." At the mount of God, Yahweh tells Moses that he may not come any closer to the bush and must remove his sandals because he is standing on *"admat qodes."* Eliade adduces this prohibition to support his thesis regarding inherent danger in the holy; for this nonhomogenous space must be set apart as a sacred area (taboo) .... Ex. 19:10-15 is generally ascribed to J. Yahweh instructs Moses and the people how to prepare for the theophany. Moses is to consecrate the people ... the clear subject of *qds piel* (*weqiddastam, wayeqaddes*) is Moses .... God wishes to encounter Israel under certain circumstances. Moses consecrates the people, i.e., places them into a condition allowing them to approach God safely.

E, D, Dtr History

- Dt. 26:19 enjoins Israel as Yahweh's people to keep his commandments in order to be holy/consecrated to Yahweh. Finally, Dt. 28:9 makes Israel's status as "holy" directly dependent on its keeping the commandments. The meaning thus fluctuates between ethical obedience, abstinence from what is impure, and worship of the one God. All these conditions lead to a proper relationship with God.

- Several passages show that "sanctifying" or "making holy" can also mean "give over to Yahweh's possession." Ex. 13:2 stipulates that one should "sanctify" or "consecrate" the firstborn (piel) .... Dt. 15:19 uses the hiphil in a similar context ... according to Dt. 26:13 the firstfruits are *qodes*.

- The Sinai pericope (Ex. 19) recounts how Moses was to "sanctify" (piel) the people in preparation for meeting God on the mountain .... vv. 20-24 stipulate that priests (!) "who approach Yahweh" must consecrate themselves (hithpael) "lest Yahweh break out against them" (v. 22). Moses is to set limits around the mountain and sanctify it (piel) in the sense of declaring it holy and thus unapproachable. Contact with the holy is dangerous for the unauthorized, whence the imposition of limits around the mountain.

- On the whole the Dtr History presents a similar picture. First of all, as Joshua explains at the assembly at Shechem, god is a holy (pl.) and jealous God, which is why one must serve him alone (Josh. 24:19). As Hannah says in her song, no one is *qados* like Yahweh (1Sam. 2:2).

P

- P uses *qds* primarily in the cultic sense .... the most fundamental stipulation is that "you must distinguish between the holy and the common (*hol*), and between the unclean and the clean."

- The altar is to be anointed and consecrated (*qds*), making it *qodes qodasim*, "most holy." Anyone who touches it becomes holy (Ex. 29:36-7; 40:9; cf. Lev. 8:10; Nu. 7:1). The holy itself is contagious, prompting caution in dealing with it; anyone approaching too close to the most holy will die (Nu. 4:19-20).

- The verb in the piel means to "sanctify" or "place into a condition of holiness" .... the hiphil form denotes the transfer of gifts to God in the sense of consecrating or dedicating something to him, placing it as his disposal (Ex. 28:38; Lev. 22:2-3; 27:14-26) .... the use of *qds* in P emphasizes a certain static element. The

dynamic and dangerous elements are bound and in a way controlled by strict regulations. Even though *le* makes *qados* into a relational term, the impression is that holiness is increasingly understood as a static, enduring characteristic. What is holy and what is profane are to be strictly distinguished, with the latter not allowed to come into contact with the former, though certain precautionary measures do allow it to be employed in one's dealings with the holy.

Chronicler's History

- The Chronicler never applies the adj. *qados* to God, but only to people (Levites in 2 Ch. 35:3) or things (festival days, Neh. 8:9-10) consecrated to Yahweh .... the most holy place in the temple is called *qodes qodasim* (1Ch. 6:34; 2Ch. 3:8, 10; 4:22; 5:7); the same expression refers to the most holy gifts or sacrifices (2Ch. 31:14; Ezr. 2:63; Neh 7:65) and to the consecrated priests (hiphil, 1Ch. 23:13) .... Ezr. 9:2 is of particular importance in its assertion that the "holy seed has mixed itself with the people of the lands," implying that the Israelites as a holy people should not mix with pagans.

Isaiah

- Only once does *qados* refer to people. "Whoever is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy" (4:3), a statement probably referring to the sacrosanct, untouchable status of the remnant rather than to their purification through judgment.
- The divine epithet *qedos yisra'el* is also of central importance for Deutero-Isaiah, who associates it first of all with the idea of creation .... God's holiness

constitutes a basic theme of the book of Isaiah. Most of the remaining occurrences of *qds* follow the general use of this term elsewhere in the OT.

Jeremiah

- Surprisingly, the root *qds* does not occur very often in the book of Jeremiah .... three passages portray hostile attacks on Israel as acts of holy war (an expression otherwise explicitly associate with *qds* only in 1Sam. 21). "Sanctify (piel) a war against Zion" (6:4); "I will consecrate destroyers against you" (22:7); "consecrate the nations for war against her" (51:27, 28). Rather than representing "archaic usage," this usage more likely ironically portrays Yahweh's punishment as a holy war. Jer. 12:3 also uses *hiqdis* figuratively. Jeremiah asks Yahweh to "consecrate" his enemies "for the day of slaughter," i.e., just as one consecrates sacrificial animals.

Ezekiel

- A quite specific aspect of the holy emerges in Ezekiel. Yahweh's holy name has been profaned (*hll*) because his people Israel have been dispersed among the nations ... for the sake of his holy name, however, he will rescue his people and lead them back to his land, thereby sanctifying his name again .... He shows himself holy by establishing his power and glory ... victory over their enemies and the gathering of the dispersed people demonstrate Yahweh's holiness to thee nations (20:41; 28:25) and lead to an acknowledgment of his status as Yahweh and of his ability to impose his will and fulfill his promises (20:41-42; 28:22; 36:23; 38:23; cf. 39:7).

- In general, then, Ezekiel places great importance on the holiness of both the temple and cultic acts, and emphasizes more than other authors the importance of maintaining the distinction between the holy and the common or unclean.

Minor Prophets
- The few occurrences of *qds* in the Minor Prophets do not allow a characterization of the individual prophets. [In] Amos ... God's holiness is what constitutes his divine being .... Hos. 11:9 draws attention to God's otherness. Israel's God will not vent his wrath because he is God and not a human being; he is the "Holy One in your midst." In 12:1 the expression *qedosim* seems to be functioning as a divine epithet (constructed similar to *elohim*); Judah remains faithful to the Holy One .... Mic. 3:5 speaks of the false prophets who declare holy war) .... Habakkuk calls Yahweh "my God, my Holy One" .... Joel twice uses the expression *har qodes* (2:1; 4:17) .... Haggai engages in a peculiar dispute concerning the holy and the common. The holy allegedly does not make that which comes into contact with it holy, though something unclean does indeed make that which comes into contact with it unclean (2:11-13) .... Zech. 14:5 anticipates Yahweh's advent, "and all the holy ones with him," referring to his heavenly entourage, perhaps the earliest reference to holy angels.

Psalms
- Occurrences of *qados* are not always clear. The "holy ones in the land" in 16:3 are probably the gods from whom the psalmist has turned away. The "holy ones" who fear Yahweh in 34:10 seem to be devout believers .... [f]requent expressions include *har qodes*, the "holy mountain," as a reference to Zion; the mount on

which Yahweh dwells participates in his holiness .... God's *qodes* is his essence, that by which he swears (89:36) ... hence the Psalms focus on God's own holiness and on his presence in the sanctuary.

Wisdom
- Not surprisingly, wisdom authors do not use the term *qds* frequently.

Daniel
- In the Hebrew portions of the book of Daniel, *qodes* refers in several instances to the sanctuary (8:13-14; 9:24, 26); reference is also made to the "holy mountain" (9:16, 20) and the "holy city" (9:24) .... the "holy covenant" is the covenant with God (11:28, 30). Israel is the "holy people" (12:7) or the "people of the holy ones" (8:24). By contrast, in 8:13 the "holy ones" are angels.

Taxonomy of *q.d.sh* use in *Tanakh*

Writing in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, David Wright takes a very different approach from Kornfeld and Ringgren. Rather than sorting by text, Wright surveys *q.d.sh* in *Tanakh* based on the ways it is used. He breaks down every instance of *q.d.sh* into six "major loci and Degrees of Holiness: 1. Divine Beings, 2. Humans, 3. Objects, 4. Places, 5. Time, 6. Miscellaneous."[88] Again, while some of Wright's specific judgments are debatable, the intent of this section is to demonstrate another way that a scholar has distinguished the various forms that *q.d.sh.* takes throughout *Tanakh*.

---

[88] This entire taxonomy comes from Wright, pp. 237-44.

1. Divine Beings.
a. God.

- The P and non-P writings both consider God the ideal manifestation, indeed the source, of holiness. Holiness is not inherent in creation but comes by God's dictates. He sanctifies or sets apart the Sabbath (Gen 2:3; Exod 20:11), Israel and its priests (Exod 29:44; 31:13; Lev 21:8, 15; 22:9, 16; Ezek 20:12; 37:28; cf. also Exod 29:43), classes of creation like the firstborn (Num 3:13; 8:17; cf. also Exod 29:43), and sanctuaries (Exod 29:44; 1Kgs 9:3, 7: 2Chr 7:16, 20; 30:8: 36:14). But if he is the sources of holiness for creations, creation – specifically his people – must maintain God's holiness and his name's holiness which, in this context, are nearly synonymous with his honor, reputation, and glory.

- Should the people sin, God or his name becomes desecrated and his holy spirit, an aspect of his character, is grieved and may abandon them (Isa 63:10, 11; Ps 51:13)

- The people are charged to emulate God's holiness by keeping the commandments (Lev 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26; cf. 20:26).

- God sustains and displays his sanctity through miraculous acts and punishments (Isa 5:16; Ezek 20:41; 28:22, 25; 36:23; 38:16, 23; 39:7, 25-27; Hab 3:3; Ps 111.9; cf. God's "holy arm" in Isa 52:10; Ps 98:1). God, as holy, is above any competitors and is eternal (Exod 15:11; 1Sam 2:2; Isa 40:25; 57:15; Hos 11:9; Hab 1:12) ... the title "Holy One of Israel" reflects this supremacy.

- Subordinate divine beings are also described as holy (Zech 14:5; Ps 16:3; 89:6, 8; Job 5:1; 15:15; Dan 4:10, 14, 20; 8:13; cf. Deut 33:2).

2. Humans. a. Priests.

- Several points indicate that the high priest has a higher degree of holiness than undistinguished priests ... a less holy class of priests among the descendants of Aaron are those with physical defects. While they are still holy enough to eat most holy offerings,, they are prohibited from serving at the altar or in the tent (Lev 21:16-23).

- The Chronicles designate Aaron and his sons as "most holy" (1Chr 23:13), in apparent contrast to the Levites whom it calls "holy" (2Chr 23:6; 35:3). The priests' holiness allows them access to the temple, to offer incense, and to attend to and guard the sanctums (1Sam 7:1; Ezra 8:28; 1Chr 23:13; 2Chr; 23:6; 26:18).

b. Israelites

- In P, lay Israelites do not share the same holy status as priests ... yet though they are denied priestly holiness attained through inaugural rites and genealogical right, they are charged to achieve another type of holiness: that which comes by obedience.

- While in P holiness is a responsibility ensuing from God choosing Israel, in D it is the resultant state of God's choosing the Israelites which they must attain. D calls the people holy in the present tense (Deut 7:6; 14:2, 21). In the related P passages only God is called holy in the present, not the people (Lev 11:41, 45; 19:2; 20:26).

- Those who suffer or survive punishment or have been redeemed are often called holy (Isa 4:3; 6:13; 62:12; Obad 17; Dan 7:18, 21-22, 25, 27; 8:24; 12:7). The people's holiness can also derive from the presence of the sanctuary among them (Ezek 37:28; see also Deut 33:3; Isa 43:28).

c. Nazirites
- Though, according to P, laypersons cannot share in priestly holiness, they could for a period of time imitate it by taking upon themselves the vow of a Nazirite (Num 6:1-21).

d. Levites and Firstborn Humans.
- Firstborn humans are holy: God dedicated them to himself in Egypt (Num 3:13; 8:17; cf. Exod 13:2) and they must be redeemed as is required with other holy items (Num 18:15-16; cf. 3:44-51). From this, one would expect the Levites, the cultic substitutes for the firstborn (Num 3:44-51), to be holy. But P never calls them such.
- In contrast to P, the Chronicler designates the Levites as holy (2Chr 23:6; 35:3) ... in other passages, all firstborn are described as belonging or being devoted to God, which intimates they are holy (Exod 13:12-13; 22:28; 34:19-20).

e. Prophets
- Only non-P literature speaks of the holiness of prophets, and what it says is meager: Elisha is called a "holy man of God" (2Kgs 4:9) and God set Jeremiah apart as a prophet (Jer 1:5).

3. Objects. a. Offerings.
- Offerings fall into two main groups, most holy and lesser. Those called most holy are the sin or purgation offering, the reparation offering, and the cereal offering, which includes the bread of presence in the tabernacle (Lev 2:3, 10; 6:10, 18, 22; 7:1, 6; 10;12, 17; 14:13; 21:22; 24:9; Num 18:9) ... the burnt offering, though not called most holy, must be included in this class by analogy (cf. Lev 14:13; cf. the hint in Num 18:9). The priestly consecration offering was probably also

considered most holy since priests were to eat it in the sanctuary court (Exod 29:31-34; Lev 8:31-32).

b. Sanctuary furniture

- Six pieces of cultic furniture are designated most holy: the ark, the incense altar, lamp stand (or menorah), bread table, the outer or burnt-offering altar, and laver (Exod 29:37; 30:10, 26-29; 40:10; Num 4:4, 19) ... location, materials, lethality, and the cultic importance of the pieces suggest a gradation of holiness, with the ark being the highest, the outer altar and laver being the lowest.

c. Priestly clothing

- All priestly clothing is holy, but that of the high priest has an elevated degree of holiness ... the high priest's clothing is also holier because it consisted of a mixture of wool and linen, a holy mixture.

- Ezekiel's clothing is exactly like that of regular priests in P. But in contrast to P, Ezekiel calls this clothing holy (42:14). This designation reflects a conception about the clothing not found in P: it has the power to render laypersons who touch it holy (42:14; 44:19).

d. Real estate

- People may dedicate their houses or inherited land (Lev 27:14-25). Doing so makes them "holy to the Lord," i.e., the property of the sanctuary and priests (v. 14). Inherited land which is not redeemed and is sold to another becomes "holy to the Lord" in the jubilee year (v. 21). It is then like a field dedicated as Heb *herem* and becomes a priestly holding (cf. v. 28).

e. Money and Precious Metals and Stones

- Money used to redeem land in the foregoing case is "holy to the Lord" (Lev 27:23). Analogically, all money or precious metals given to the sanctuary would be holy.

- The holiness of dedicated money and booty is well attested outside of P. These items were put into sanctuary treasuries (Josh 6:17, 19, 24; 2Sam 8:10-12; 1Kngs 7:51; 15:15; 2Kgs 12:5-17; 1Chr 18:9-11; 2Chr 5:1; 15:18; 24:5-14; cf. Ezra 8:24-29).

f. Mixtures

- Certain mixtures are prohibited: cross-breeding animals, plowing with an ox and ass together, sowing a field or vineyard with two different types of seeds, and making or wearing a Heb *sa'atnez* garment, i.e., one made of wool and linen (Lev 19:19: Deut 22:9-11). The reason seems to be that mixtures are holy (Deut 22:9). This explains in part the holiness of the high priest's clothing and of the fabric wall and hangings of the tabernacle which employ a mixture of wool and linen. Israelites are allowed to use mixtures in one case. They are to wear fringes on the edges or corners of clothing, normally made of linen, and with a thread of blue, implicitly of wool, attached (Num 15:37-41; Deut 22:12).

g. Oil

- Oil used for anointing priests, the tabernacle, and its furniture had a special and restricted composition and was holy (Exod 20:22-33; 37:29; Num 35:25).

h. Incense

- Like anointing oil, incense used on the incense altar and on the Day of Atonement has a unique restricted formula (Exod 30:34-38; cf. Lev 16:12-13). The texts calls

it "holy" (Exod 30:35, 37), but once calls it "most holy" which is technically more correct (v. 36).

i. Water
- Holy water is mentioned in the ordeal for a woman suspected of committing adultery (Num 5:17). Water libations (1Sam 7:6; cf. 2Sam 23:16) and the river flowing from the temple in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 47:12; cf. Joel 4:18; Zech 14:8) may be considered holy.

4. Places. a. Sanctuaries
- Terminology shows a gradation of different parts of the tabernacle … but the entire tent structure could be called "most holy" which indicates its collective holiness is greater than the rest of the sanctuary area (Exod 30:26, 29).
- The distribution of furniture, the extent of access to the different parts of the sanctuary, the materials used in the tabernacle, and anointing rites also display the structure's graded holiness. The ark, the most important piece of furniture, is in the adytum; the incense altar, lamp stand, and bread table are in the shrine; and the burnt-offering altar and laver, the least holy of the most holy furniture, are in the court. Similarly, only the high priest, the holiest of Israelites, is allowed in the adytum; the high priest aided by regular priests performs daily and weekly rites in the shrine; and the Levites and Israelites, both profane, have access only to the court.
- Non-P literature mentions cult places and sanctuaries in towns such as Beer-sheba, Bethel, Gibeon, Gilgal, Hebron, Mizpah (of Benjamin), Nob, Ophrah (of Abiezer), Ramah (Ramathaim), Shechem, Shiloh, as well as in undefined places.

These cult places would have been considered holy – if not by particular biblical book or tradition, which may treat them as illegitimate, at least by worshipers there.

- The entire area of Solomon's temple, including courts, was called a Heb *miqdas*, "holy/sanctuary area".

b. Places of Theophany

- Moses was told to remove his shoes on Sinai because the ground was holy (Exod 3:5; cf. Josh 5:15). The mountain's hallowed state was due to God's presence there (Exod 19:9-25; 24:16-17; Deut 4:10-5:29) – it was "God's mountain" (1Kgs 19:8; cf. vv. 8-14). Rules that the people purify themselves for the theophany there (Exod 19:10, 14-15, 22) and not encroach on the mountain's boundaries on the penalty of death (vv. 12-13, 17, 21, 23-24) also evidence its sacred character.

- Places where God or angels appeared to the patriarchs and others, and where they, in consequence, set up altars or pillars, may be considered sacred (e.g., Shechem: Gen 12:6-7; Bethel: 28:10-22; 35:1-5, 9-15; Gideon in Ophrah: Judg 6:20-24).

c. Land of Israel and Jerusalem

- Though some of the P laws perhaps hint that the land of Israel is holy (Lev 18:25-28; Num 35:33-34), only the non-P literature explicitly calls it or its cities such (Exod 15:13; Isa 64:9; Zech 2:16; Ps 78:54; cf. Zech 14:20-21; Ps 114:2; Ezra 9:8; perhaps Josh 5:15). The Heb term *har haqqodes*, "the holy mountain," and its variations often refers to the entire land of Israel (Isa 11:9; 57:13; 65:25; Jer 31:23; Obad 16: Zeph 3:11; cf. Isa 27:13; Joel 2:1; Ps 87:1). Other passages imply the holiness of the land (Josh 22:19; 2Kgs 5:17; Ezek 4:14; Hos 9:3-4; Amos

7:17; Ps 137:4; Ezra 6:21). More specifically, the city of Jerusalem is called holy (Isa 48:2; 52:1; Ps 46:5; Dan 9:24; Neh 11:1, 18), and the term *har haqqodes*: "the holy mountain" (and variants) can refer particularly to it. Jeremiah speaks in detail of a promised increase of holiness to be experienced by the city (Jer. 31:38-40; cf. Zech 14:20-21).

e. Heaven

- As God's dwelling on earth, namely the sanctuary, is holy, so his dwelling in heaven is holy. Various Heb terms are used: me'on qodso/qodseka, "his/your holy habitation" (Deut 26:15; Jer 25:30; Zech 2:17; Ps 68:6; 2Chr 30:27) ... [more].

5. Time. a. Sabbath

- The OT generally calls the Sabbath sacred and describes or prescribes its sanctification by abstaining from work.

b. Holidays

- P designates certain holidays as Heb *miqra qodes*, perhaps meaning "declaration of, call for, summoning to holiness" rather than "holy convocation" (cf. Lev 23:2, 4, 37).

c. Jubilee and Sabbatical Year

- The sabbatical year is not called holy but the requirement to not sow or harvest would indicate it has a holiness similar to the jubilee (Lev. 25:2-7). The restrictions enforcing rest indicate that these periods of time are holy.

6. Miscellaneous. a. War

- Several passages speak of "sanctifying" or inaugurating war (Jer 6:4; Joel 4:9; Mic 3:5). While the verb may simply mean to "prepare," it may refer to

performing preparatory rites, including purification. Like the holiness associated

with theophany, it may be the divine presence that makes a war holy.

b. Covenant
- A covenant can be called holy (Dan 11:28, 30) and can be desecrated (Mal 2:10;

  Ps 55:21; 89:35; Neh 13:29).

Chapter 4:
God and holiness

Now that we have established a baseline of early academic understandings of holiness, we can move into some more recent analysis. Chapters four, five, and six will present a number of theories that are more nuanced than what we have seen previously. Still, it will become clear that these theories present tensions and contesting ideas; as a result, each of these chapters will conclude with a "Response" section in order to highlight the nature of these differences and analyze some of their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Certainly the most dominant theme that has come up repeatedly in our earlier examination of classical academic definitions of holiness and roots of the Hebrew *q.d.sh* was some sort of connection to God. It would be easy to say, as many scholars have, that *q.d.sh* simply represents God, that which belongs to God, or that which is dedicated to or in relation with God. Indeed, there is plentiful evidence for all of these claims. But I believe that a thorough examination of *q.d.sh* in the *Tanakh* will reveal a more complex picture.

Biblical scholarship on holiness and God

Exploring what biblical scholarship has to say about the meaning behind the use of holiness in relation to God will provide an important foundation for our study. To begin with, many biblical texts appear to provide a direct reason for commanding us to be

holy: "Israel is commanded to be holy 'because I YHWH am holy' (Lev 11:45; 19:2; 20:26; Num 15:40). This recurring motif must be read carefully. According to the classical interpretation, Israel's holiness is a matter of *imitatio dei*. By living up to the laws in Leviticus 19, it is generally held, Israel imitates the attributes of God, and this is how it becomes holy."[89] However, Schwartz notes that this is actually a midrashic interpretation which is not supported well by the text itself. In fact,

> The charge to be holy occurs invariably in the context of commanded acts from which the imitation of divine qualities is patently absent. Is God supposed to honor parents, or to adhere to the laws of sacrifice? Is refraining from eating the fruit of the first four years an attribute of the divine? .... [a]nd while such traits as love of the stranger and concern for the poor are held to be divine attributes, this is only outside of the priestly literature; such an idea couldn't be farther from H's mind. Close reading of the texts reminds us that the Israelites are not told to be holy like God; rather they are commanded to be holy *because* He is holy. Their holiness cannot be like His, it can only be analogous.[90]

So while this line of reasoning once again makes it clear that our holiness is related to God's holiness, it does not help us define what that holiness is.

More to the point is the next argument, which is that holiness comes from God. According to a common reading of the Priestly tradition, holiness "is an emanation from the Godhead outward, radiating from the divine abode to whatever is in range and tuned in to receive it. Impurity is what is exuded by earthly death and its manifestations, moving inward towards the divine abode and accumulating there unless it is not cleaned out."[91] This conception of holiness assures Israel that within the structure of the Priestly theology, God's presence will remain in Israel's midst as long as Israel takes care of God's abode. And the way to do this is to prevent the accumulation of sins and impurity.

---

[89] Schwartz, p. 56.
[90] Schwartz, pp. 56-7.
[91] Schwartz, p. 59.

Further, the H texts teach us that by keeping God's laws, all of Israel can have access to the dynamic holiness which God exudes. Holiness is the benefit of having God in our presence, and purity is what keeps God with us.[92]

God's power

Another compelling argument is that somehow, holiness is related to the need for humanity to regulate and manage our interaction with God's power. Baruch Levine eloquently describes the cultural development that may have led to the biblical writers' incorporation of power concepts into their system of holiness:

> We can consider the relationship between holiness and power, for sanctification is essentially a quest for power .... [a]t some point in early antiquity, animism and dynamism were fused in the notion of god, a latecomer in the history of religious ideas. As time passed, the god-idea, having become the focus of power concepts, began to transcend its immanent conceptualization, with the result that power itself could be perceived as transcendent. Based on what is known of ancient Near Eastern civilizations, we can say that the conception of divine power as transcendent was first formulated within the context of Israelite monotheism and expressed in the Hebrew Bible; there we learn that power comes from the God is Israel, who is all-powerful. It is a moot question as to whether Israelite monotheism, in any of its phases, allowed for the reality of power that did not come from the God of Israel, but it is quite certain that it advocated exclusive reliance on God's power and thoroughly condemned reliance on any other presumed source.
>
> The difference between the biblical attitude toward power and the attitude characteristic of the Mesopotamian religion has been stated most clearly by Thorkild Jacobsen. His view is presented in a discussion of a biblical theophany, the episode of the "burning bush" in Ex. 3:1-5:

---

[92] Schwartz, p. 59.

The story makes it clear that God is totally distinct from the bush out of which he chose to speak to Moses. God happened, as it were, to sojourn there; but he is altogether transcendent, and there is nothing but a purely situational, ephemeral relation with the bush. An ancient Mesopotamian would have experienced such a confrontation very differently. He too would have seen and heard numinous power, but power of, not just in, the bush, power at the center of its being, the vital force causing it to be and making it thrive and flourish. He would have experienced the numinous as immanent.

The Mesopotamian view was common to ancient Near Eastern religions generally. Israelite monotheism, as reflected even in early biblical narrative, operated with a predominantly transcendent conception of God, whereas polytheistic religions … functioned with a predominantly immanent conception.

We can now pose the question of power in a new perspective: How, in a transcendent frame of reference, does the holy interact with divine power? Because power is viewed as transcendent, not immanent, its presence or availability cannot be taken for granted. For power to be present, God must be present. To a limited degree, the same dynamic operates even within the framework of immanence, but when access to power is restricted to one, transcendent being, there is bound to be more anxiety about securing it! From the perspective of the divine, holiness is God's preferred way of relating to the religious community. To the extent that the community does things "God's way," so to speak, its benefits increase. In contrast, God is alienated by unholiness, such as is generated by the failure to sanctify what stands in an intimate relation to Him. In such an event, God becomes enraged and either abandons the community or punishes it severely, even to the point of destroying it; in other words, He denies it power.

Holiness thus becomes a necessity if the community is to receive the power it wants or needs. Holiness is the way to deal with God's power. One of the functions of an organized religion is, therefore, to identify what should be sanctified; in other words, to set down procedures for dealing with God's power. This sort of activity encourages God to be "present" in the human community and enhances the "potent"-ialities of the human-divine encounter.[93]

---

[93] Levine (1987), pp. 248-50.

Power, of course, can be at the same time enticing and scary, helpful and harmful. One scholar describes it well, saying that "[holiness] draws a circle around the people so that they are grouped apart from other peoples; but it also distances them from God. In part, as with a nuclear reactor, one is both drawn to God because of his power, because of his mystery, yet also one is included to turn and move away for self protection."[94]

In fact, we can imagine that in the biblical context, there was great anxiety about meriting God's holiness and securing the benefits of God's presence. Our ancestors likely believed that

> Without God life is incredibly precarious, be it present life in the form of rain and cattle to future life in the form of progeny. In this sense, God's power is like water in a desert, a scarce resource, precariously obtained and maintained. Access to power can often mean life and order, alienation from power, death and chaos. According to this view, holiness can have two meanings. First, holiness can be synonymous with divine power. Holy objects, people or places are somehow imbued with this dangerous but life-giving divine power and must be deftly treated. "Holiness is a term for power ... these manifestations of power are without specific moral content, yet in courts of time the conduct of man is inseparably related to his understanding of how he is to deal with the Holy, with that revelation of power in his midst the reality of which is indubitable." (W. Taylor Smith and Walter J. Harrelson, "Holiness" in *Dictionary of the Bible*, 1963, p. 387) This interpretation is understandable, given that mere contact with or proximity to holy objects can be lethal .... [t]hese irruptions (sic) of power (Nadav & Abihu in Lev. 10:1-3 and Uza touching the ark in II Samuel 6:6f) may be understood as raw, undirected power which, if not properly channeled, is incredibly dangerous. Holiness can also be understood as the method through which humanity can safely interact with God's power.[95]

---

[94] Thomas M. Raitt, "Holiness and Community in Leviticus 19:2ff," *Proceedings. Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Bible Societies 4*, 1984.
[95] Diamond, pp. 83-84.

We may quibble with the idea that God's power vis-à-vis Nadav and Abihu was "undirected," but the point remains that if humanity is to utilize God's power for our benefit, there must be a system for interacting safely and effectively with that power.

Although "the paradox of holiness as a system for relating to God's power is that it both distances the people from power while allowing them access,"[96] it also begins to provide us with a link between God's holiness and Israel's quest for holiness. Many scholars insist that in one way or another, holiness flows from God to the world and humanity. But just as we may view holiness as a system by which humanity deals with God's power, we might notice that the use of holiness is *Tanakh* is not so simple as cases of God providing power or holiness to humanity. In fact, there are some startling examples of the opposite!

Sanctifying God

If God is, indeed, holy, permanently holy, and/or the source of holiness, then it would be counterintuitive to suggest that God could be "made holy." Although in English we use a more neutral term like "sanctified," which makes it sounds like something other than holiness may be involved, in Hebrew when we come across a term such as *niqdashti* (Lev. 22:32) it is actually saying "I was made or became holy." But we should reasonably ask, "who and what has the power to sanctify? Clearly God can consecrate persons, things and places, while Moses is but an agent of God in sanctifying persons and things."[97] Surprisingly, it seems that priests, too, have "the power to sanctify the offerings

---

[96] Diamond, p. 85.
[97] Kugler, p. 11.

made by the laity and by the priests themselves."[98] Taking it even further, however, it

becomes clear that "Leviticus 17-26 grants [the power to make holy] to all Israelites as

well. Not only are the people of Israel commanded to be holy (11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7, 26);

they are also to sanctify themselves (11:44; 20:7), their sacrifices (22:2-3), and the jubilee

year (25:10). While Leviticus 1-16 carefully avoids using the verbs derived from *k.d.sh* to

describe the actions of ordinary Israelites, Leviticus 17-26 applies it to them

enthusiastically."[99]

The idea that humanity has the power to make holy is not an aberration limited to

a single passage or section. In fact, we find that

> There is a curious interaction between the human and the divine
> with respect to holiness. Thus, in Exodus 20:8, the Israelites are
> commanded to sanctify the Sabbath and to make it holy; and yet
> verse 11 of the same commandment states that it was God who
> declared the Sabbath day holy. Similarly, God declared that Israel
> had been selected to become His holy people; but this declaration
> was hardly sufficient to make Israel holy .... [t]he same
> interaction is evident, therefore, in the commandment to sanctify
> the Sabbath, with God and the Israelite people acting in tandem
> so as to realize the holiness of this occasion.[100]

It would appear that not only is God not solely responsible for holiness, but that

humanity and God must come together in some way in order to create holiness. Even this,

however, is not the most striking revelation to the question of who creates holiness. In

Numbers 20:12, God tells Moses and Aaron that they will not be allowed to lead the

Israelites into the Promised Land. The reason, however, is because in the episode with

water from the rock, they did not "make God holy in the eyes of the Children of Israel." It

is not simply that they did not trust in God, they were required to make God holy!

---

[98] Kugler, p. 11.
[99] Kugler, p. 16.
[100] Levine (1989), p. 256

Pushing the concept even further, we might find that,

> This idea is taken to its logical conclusion in the concluding
> verses of Leviticus 22, which state that the performance of the
> commandments also enables God's own holiness to be manifest,
> which failure to perform them is a profanation of His name. Vv.
> 31-32: "You shall observe My commandments, and perform
> them: I am YHWH. You shall not profane My holy name, that I
> may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people – I YHWH
> sanctify you." The verb weniqdasti conveys that YHWH's
> holiness will be demonstrated and thereby acknowledged. He
> sanctifies them by His presence if they keep His laws, and this in
> turn is what perpetuates His own holiness.[101]

We find in this passage from Leviticus 22:32 "the radical claim that God is made holy among the people of Israel; the implication is that the people have a consecrating effect on God."[102] Although much of our previous analysis indicates that God is the source of consecrating power, it appears that

> We do share a characteristic with God, that we mutually separate
> the other from members of its kind; We separate God from other
> gods to enter into an exclusive relationship with Him, and God
> separates Israel from other peoples to enter into a(n exclusive)
> relationship with God. As we have seen, maintaining an
> exclusive relationship is associated with holiness .... Israel is
> holy in that it has been separated from all other peoples to have
> an exclusive relationship with this God. Conversely, God is holy
> because he has been separated from all the other Gods to have a(n
> exclusive) relationship with Israel.[103]

Isaiah

One of the iconic uses of *q.d.sh* can be found in the Book of Isaiah. While various prophets present diverse characterizations of holiness, Isaiah's voice on holiness is the most pronounced. For Isaiah, holiness is a central concept and a term that is used

---

[101] Schwartz, pp. 57-58.
[102] Kugler, p. 16.
[103] Diamond, pp. 95-6.

frequently as an epithet for God. Levine notes that "there are more biblical instances of *qadosh* in the meanings 'deity, angel, holy person' than are normally recognized."[104]

Although Isaiah 6:3 shows up in our liturgy and is very familiar to even common readers, and even though it is recognized as an acclamation for God, it is often translated in a manner that obscures its intended meaning. Levine instructs that

> The first line of the trisagion is usually rendered: "Holy, Holy, Holy; the LORD of Hosts," or "Holy, Holy, Holy is the LORD of Hosts." But S.D. Luzzatto (1800 – 1865) came closer to a correct understanding of this verse in his Italian rendering of Isaiah 6:3: "Holy One, Holy One, Holy One; He is the Lord *Sabaot*" ....
> [this scene] is not one of direct address. Rather, a third-person orientation predominates: the God of Israel is being announced. The seraphim are His heralds; they are not addressing God as worshipers. The LORD has entered His throne room and taken His seat. The angels proclaim to all present that He is enthroned.[105]

Throughout the Book of Isaiah *q.d.sh* appears 73 times. At first glance, it may appear that Isaiah's steady use of *q.d.sh* as an appellation limits our ability to discern any meaning for holiness in this text. However, a closer examination reveals that even when using variations of *q.d.sh* as a form of address, there is great nuance in the way Isaiah uses these terms, leading us to a better understanding of how Isaiah recognizes holiness.

Isaiah refers to God as קְדוֹשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל (*q'dosh Yisrael*) repeatedly (1:4, 5:19; 5:24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; 29:19; 30:11, 12, 15; 31:1; 37:23; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7; 54:5; 55:5; 60:9, 14). We have already noted that the famous depiction in 6:3 is another way of referring to God, and there are many more. Even in these cases, we can detect characteristics of God's holiness. For example, in chapter 6, when the *seraphim* announce God's holy presence, Isaiah is struck with fear: "I said, 'Woe is me; I am lost!

---

[104] Levine (1987), p. 252.
[105] Levine (1987), pp. 252-3.

For I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell amidst a people of unclean lips; Yet my eyes have seen Adonai Tzvaot." (6:5) One of the *seraphim*, however, purges his unclean lips of their sin by touching a live coal from the altar to them. Isaiah does not want to approach God's holiness with unclean lips, and implies that the effect would be harmful to him, not God. In this case, then, Isaiah is presenting holiness as dangerous. At the same time, holiness is not always dangerous, since Isaiah is finally able to approach when his lips have been made clean.

During the same interaction, God first reveals to Isaiah the concept of זֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ (*zera kodesh*), the holy seed (6:13). In disclosing the coming banishment of the people from the Land, God offers some comfort in the fact that a portion of the people will survive the coming expulsion. They will remain as a stump after a tree is felled, and act as a holy seed. Clearly, this remnant is a seed, as they can serve as the start of repopulation. But why a holy seed? What is the difference?

Twice in Isaiah (62:12; 63:18), the people are referred to as עַם־הַקֹּדֶשׁ (*am haqodesh*), a holy people. In each case, God seems to be making a clear statement that both before and after exile, the entire people can be considered holy. Previously, though, in 4:3, it is only those who will remain behind in Jerusalem who are called קָדוֹשׁ (*qadosh*). These are the ones equated with זֶרַע קֹדֶשׁ (*zera kodesh*), which implies that it is specifically the portion of the people who remain in Zion who may be considered holy.

Besides God and people, Isaiah speaks often of places as holy. On several occasions (48:2; 52:1; 64:9) he calls Jerusalem עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ (*ir haqodesh*). Although these are rare occurrences, they belie a grand theme within Isaiah. These particular verses are

from chapters likely written during the period of destruction and exile[106], which is a primary concern for Isaiah. Exile was a horrifying experience for this people, and Jerusalem took on an even greater import for people yearning to return to the Land of Israel. In fact, 48:1-2 makes the fascinating claim that when the People Israel remember God they do so not due to truth or righteousness, but by means of the holy city! Jerusalem (and specifically its holiness) appears to be a conduit here for the relationship between God and Israel.[107]

Besides God, however, the most common reference to holiness is הַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ (*har haqodesh*), the holy mountain (11:9; 27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 65:11; 65:25; 66:20). Similar to Jerusalem, the holy mountain is a place of intersection between God and Israel. The holy mountain is first and foremost the place to where God will return Israel (27:13; 56:7; 57:13; 66:20). Again, if the people are essentially being returned to God, this holy mountain is the place for their reunion. Second, it is a place where people must take notice of God and God's ways and no evil shall be done (11:9 and 65:25 – presumably because it would not match God's holiness to do evil on God's holy mountain). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 65:11 makes an interesting connection when it decries those who would forsake God. It is not simply God, though, as the passage repeats the warning to people "who ignore My holy mountain." Isaiah seems to be making the statement that God's holy mountain is the place where people should interact with God. By ignoring that holy place, they are forsaking God.

---

[106] T.C. Eskenazi, class lecture, August 30, 2004.
[107] This will become particularly important later in this paper – see analysis of Hosea 11 in chapter 7.

Isaiah treats holiness as a matter of great importance. Beyond merely recognizing God as holy, however, Isaiah is telling us quite clearly that in this situation holiness is a point of intersection between God and Israel.

Response

I think it would be difficult to find many people who would disagree with the idea that God is holy. It has risen to an article of faith that God and holiness are closely related. Nonetheless, in order to achieve a clear understanding about the nature of holiness, it is important to ask more specifically what this relationship is and how it works. For example, Schwartz offers an effective critique of *imitatio dei* as an explanation for our striving for holiness in verses such as Leviticus 19:2. Even in the Torah, where God is described with abundant anthropomorphic language, it simply does not make sense to think that the holiness we are striving for is the same as God. The fact that such items as cultic implements and the Land of Israel are called holy within *Tanakh* adds further credence to the idea that holiness is not merely an attribute of God.

Better is the argument that holiness somehow stems from God. Schwartz claims that holiness may be "received" by objects or people, while impurity is a manifestation of death and earthly concerns. Holiness is godly, he says, while non-holy is human. While this is an attractive opinion, I am not convinced that the text bears it out. To begin with, if holiness is an emanation that must be received by an object or person in order for them to become holy, how can an intangible such as Shabbat be holy? How can a time "receive" an emanation? Moreover, we have noted later in this same chapter that it is not only God

who has the ability to create holiness. In fact, Israel is, on various occasions, empowered to sanctify objects, time, and even God.

Kugler argues that there is a strict differentiation between how this power is presented in the P text of Leviticus 1-16 and the H text of Leviticus 17-26. However, he neglects Leviticus 11, where we find the first call to holiness for the entire people within the framework of dietary laws. After a detailed list of what Israel may and may not consume, God provides the impetus for eating this way: "For I am Adonai your God: you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile your souls with any swarming thing that moves upon the earth. For I am Adonai, who raised you up from the land of Egypt to be your God: you shall be holy, for I am holy." [108] In this instance, Israel is clearly the sanctifying power.

Regardless of whether the text is precisely split in terms of Israel's ability to sanctify, it remains clear that Israel does possess this power. Even more striking, humanity is presented as having the ability to sanctify God. If God is the source of holiness, none of this would make any sense, and so the truth must be more complicated.

I find the argument about the need to manage God's power much more convincing. It is clear in the text that God's presence confers bounty upon Israel, even as it is clear that God's presence can be dangerous. Holy people, holy objects, holy times – all are utilized by Israel in order to maintain a beneficial relationship with God.

Levine presents the idea that God and Israel must act in concert in order to create the holiness of Shabbat. This is an idea that we will explore in much more detail in chapter 8. Until then, suffice it to say that we may reasonably conclude that both God and

---

[108] Leviticus 11:44-45.

Israel are necessary to achieve holiness – a supposition that even our analysis of Isaiah

seems to confirm.

Chapter 5:
Fluctuations in the nature of holiness

Clearly, much work has been done on the nature of God's role in holiness. At the same time, many scholars have noticed that the nature of holiness is not monolithic throughout *Tanakh*. Much earlier, in Ringgren's analysis of holiness, he concludes that "there is no essential difference between the prophets and, for instance, the books of the law, as to the conception of holiness. The prophets obviously accepted the cultic notion of holiness, as it is preserved to us in the ritual laws of the Pentateuch."[109] But contrary to Ringgren's claim that holiness remains constant through at least the Pentateuch and Prophets, there are differing – even competing – notions about the nature of holiness within the confines of *Tanakh*. Ringgren himself notes, for example, that holiness can be either ethical or cultic. He says that "we are used to giving the word 'holy' a significance that is decidedly ethical. But most of the passages dealt with above speak of holiness as a cultic notion without any ethical features, or seem to be neutral from an ethical point of view .... it is remarkable that the ethical aspect of holiness plays a very subordinate part in the prophetic preaching."[110]

Over time, a number of scholars have explored differing ways that holiness is portrayed in the *Tanakh*. As we attempt to better understand the concrete meaning of holiness, then, it will be important for us to understand each of them, and how they might work together in creating an overall model.

---

[109] Ringgren, p. 18.
[110] Ringgren, pp. 22-3.

Graded Holiness

One such exploration of holiness was undertaken by Philip Jenson. He coined a term that has come to accurately portray one commonly-held understanding about holiness in *Tanakh*: graded holiness. According to Jenson, who essentially confined his study to the Priestly texts, there is a Holiness Spectrum which represents many levels of holiness. The Priestly writer(s) utilize a graded system of holiness in order to describe the workings of the cult, making holiness a very practical system by which the priests know how to classify the world and operate the cult. According to this theory, "holiness is employed in all four dimensions [of structure for defining the cult and cultic texts – place, time, act performed, person performing it], and reflects a graded conception of the world. In various contexts, it is possible to detect levels of holiness ranging from extreme sanctity to extreme uncleanness."[111]

In order to help describe this system, Jenson provides the following representation of the Holiness Spectrum:

	I	II	III	IV	V
	Very Holy	Holy	Clean	Unclean	Very Unclean
	K'dosh K'doshim	*Kadosh*	*Tahor*	*Tameh*	*Tameh*
Spatial	Holy of holies	Holy place	Court	Camp	Outside
Personal	High Priest	Priest	Levites, clean Israelites	Clean, minor impurities	Major impurities, the dead
	Sacrificial animals	Sacrificial animals	Clean animals	Unclean animals	Carcasses
Ritual	Sacrificial (not eaten)	Sacrificial (priests eat)	Sacrificial (non-priests eat)	Purification (1 day)	Purification (7 days)
Temporal	Day of Atonement	Festivals, Sabbath	Common days		

---

[111] Jenson, p. 36.

This table defies not only the polarities of Eliade, but a number of other theories about P's notions of purity and holiness. In essence, *hol* is an antonym not only for *qadosh*, but for the entire spectrum of holiness. Even clean and unclean items fall within the range of holiness, opposing *hol*. Jenson's work deals solely with the *qadosh* side of the equation. Everything here is either more or less holy, and *hol* is something else entirely. *Hol* is things that cannot be holy at all, such as my kitchen table – it is not *tameh* or *tahor* or *qadosh*, it is simply not part of the system.

On the most fundamental level, he demonstrates how "four common words in the Priestly vocabulary (holy, profane, clean, unclean[112]) witness to P's graded conception of the world."[113] He argues that the use of these distinct terms is not accidental; instead, it points to a range of meanings and significance within the general conception of holiness.

In describing what he means by holiness, Jenson finds little use for Otto's ideas. He says that "the holiness and glory of God may be unique, but they are expressed not so much in terms of human reactions of dread, vitality and fascination, but through a developed system of cultic laws and prohibitions."[114] It is here that "the holiness word group can refer not only to a status, but also to the transitions between states."[115] In a manner reminiscent of some of our earlier ideas about holiness, Jenson states: "if the 'holy' is defined as that which belongs to the sphere of God's being or activity, then this might correspond to a claim of ownership, a statement of close association, or proximity

---

[112] Although Jenson uses "clean" and "unclean" here, a better translation would be "pure" and "impure".
[113] Jenson, p. 39.
[114] Jenson, p. 43.
[115] Jenson, p. 46.

to his cultic presence."[116] And while he obviously will focus on the cultic need for holiness, Jenson also allows that

> The restriction of holiness to the priests and the sanctuary is in tension with other occurrences of the root where it has a much broader scope. Holiness can describe God's demands on the whole of Israel, which is called to imitate God's own holiness (Lev. 19.2). This meaning often occurs when the passage is referring to matters other than the cult in the narrower sense. Thus holiness should characterize Israel it its distinctiveness in relation to the nations with regard to purity laws (Lev. 11.44-45) or moral behavior (Lev. 19). On special cultic occasions, when all Israel was involved, they attained the broader holiness, which was not permanent and ceased as a natural consequence of time.[117]

For example, "the Nazirite vow was open to all Israelites, male or female, priest or lay. The vow entailed restrictions similar to those which the high priest had to observe ... The holiness of the Nazirite was only temporary and non-communicable and so not confined to the sanctuary or to the priesthood."[118]

Once he clarifies the general nature of holiness for the purposes of his study, Jenson begins to describe the import of a spectrum of holiness ideas. Perhaps the most vital is the fact that "it is a serious cultic sin to bring the unclean into contact with the holy. Such an action produces a dangerous mismatch of levels in the Holiness Spectrum, since the holy and the unclean are at least two degrees removed and at opposite poles. Many of the laws and institutions of P are designed to reduce this possibility, especially in the region of the Tabernacle."[119] The problem for the priestly writer was what to do when divine and earthly spheres overlapped. Even though "the holy and the profane could be characterized by the subjects' presence in or absence from the divine sphere,

---

[116] Jenson, p. 48.
[117] Jenson, p. 49.
[118] Jenson, p. 50.
[119] Jenson, p. 52.

while the purity laws were primarily concerned with non-cultic matters,"[120] they did affect one another. The result is a complex priestly system designed to keep the poles apart. A problem arises, however, in that "holiness and uncleanness are not in themselves fixed properties; an object or person is holy or unclean by being associated with one pole or another of the Holiness Spectrum."[121]

On a practical level, "a person's or community's life includes important changes, and these are often affirmed, brought about, corrected and evaluated in ritual. In P, various rituals mark the transitions between a number of the states in the Holiness Spectrum, particularly the clean and the unclean (purification) and the clean and the holy (consecration)."[122] One reason for such ritual is that both holiness and impurity are substances which can be manipulated, and as such, require a system to organize their management. In terms of the Holiness Spectrum, then, "contagion is one way in which the special character of the extreme poles of experience is marked, whether of the holy or the unclean." [123] Jenson argues that similarities such as this between holiness and impurity arise not because they share a common essence, but specifically because they represent opposite ends of the same holiness spectrum: "Meeting God and meeting death are both momentous events that profoundly touch a person's life. The laws of contagion are a means by which this truth is expressed and regulated."[124]

Moving to the specifics of holiness grading, Jenson offers that "the spatial dimension is the clearest expression of the Holiness Spectrum in its grading and its polarities. The architecture of the Tabernacle and the camp comprises a stable

---

[120] Jenson, p. 55.
[121] Jenson, p. 64.
[122] Jenson, p. 65.
[123] Jenson, p. 71.
[124] Jenson, p. 72.

classification of space with various zones separated by distinct boundaries."[125] Of course,

grading extends beyond the Tabernacle. Not surprisingly, there are different levels of

holiness for the Priests, Israel, and God:

> The principle of graded levels of holiness is central to the
> outworking of the personal dimension. Israel could be called
> holy, but this was not intended to diminish the special holiness of
> the priests, for whom it was the necessary and defining attribute
> .... the holiness of the priests was on the same order as that of the
> holy areas of the Tabernacle. The priests could thus perform
> cultic acts on behalf of the Israelites, who had to remain at a
> distance from the holy things ... however, only God was holy in
> the absolute sense.[126]

However, even this was not entirely true: "the close association of [God's] presence and

holiness (e.g. Ex. 29.42-44; Lev. 9.4; 16.2) suggests that presence as well as holiness can

be a graded quality, and both be exhibited and manifested. It can be considered to have an

intensity which varies according to the graded dimensions of the Holiness Spectrum."[127]

Even within one group, such as priests, where we find variation in the level of

holiness for different priests, there is more. According to Jenson, individual priests could

rise and fall in holiness: "While the priests were fully consecrated, they lost their full

holiness when they left the sanctuary. The preliminary rituals recalled the initial

consecration and confirmed that the priestly holiness was once again effective, and that it

was safe for them to take on the priestly role."[128] So, too, mourning rites indicate a

difference in priestly holiness. Priests, for example, were required to exempt themselves

from some Israelite mourning customs. Taking this concept even further, we recognize

that the high priest had duties related to the inner sanctum that were unique to him. As a

---

[125] Jenson, p. 89.
[126] Jenson, p. 119.
[127] Jenson, pp. 113-4.
[128] Jenson, p. 121.

result, he was forbidden from taking part in even more mourning customs than regular priests, who possessed a lesser degree of holiness. Interestingly, these differences recognize the incompatibility of the priestly function with the taint of death while at the same time recognizing – and making exception for – the reality that death touches all lives. As one moves closer to the inner sanctum and to God's presence, one's grade of holiness increases until reaching the highest holiness of God.[129]

On a multitude of levels, then, the Priestly system made holiness into a functional characteristic that could be used in different ways based on the situational need. Whether time, place, or person, the system defined differing grades of holiness to match function or need – a grading which makes the entire priestly concept of holiness much more utilitarian in the real world.

Varying scholarly notions about Holiness

Although Jenson does an excellent job of distinguishing between levels of holiness within the Priestly text, it is important to note that since he chooses Leviticus as his text, he leaves out analysis of the differing conceptions of holiness that appear across various texts in the *Tanakh*. In fact, there are a number of lenses through which different scholars have peered in order to explain the varying conceptions of holiness between different texts within *Tanakh*. And while some of their ideas may be in tension, each brings an additional level of analysis to the multifaceted biblical conception of holiness.

---

[129] Jenson, p. 129.

Cult vs. Morality

As Ringgren noticed, there seems to be a clear demarcation between ethical and cultic notions of holiness. Even within the Priestly texts, we can see first that "Leviticus 1-16 restricts holiness to persons and things associated with the temple. Persons holy to God include high priests and priests (Lev. 8:30); objects include offerings (2:3, 10; 6:10, 18, 22, etc.), sanctuary furniture (16:2, 12-13), priestly clothing (8:9), money and precious stones given to the temple treasury (5:15, 18), and oil and incense used in temple ceremonies (2:1, 4). The only holy place is the sanctuary (10:4)."[130] At the same time, we find that "while the first half of Leviticus restricted holiness to persons and things associated with the temple, the second half is well-known for expanding the domain of holiness .... [t]he authors of this part of Leviticus think that holiness takes in all of Israel and its inhabitants."[131] Setting aside for a moment our earlier criticism that Leviticus 11 seems to belie this claim, in fact the expansion of holiness is more than a question of who can be holy. Israel Knohl finds that the Holiness School (Leviticus 17-26) is actually a corrective to the Priestly Text (Leviticus 1-16, among others), bringing the ideas of morality into the previous cultic striving for the holy.

According to Knohl, the revolution began with the Prophet Isaiah:

> A seminal verse in Isaiah reveals how profound Isaiah's conceptual revolution was: "And the Lord of Hosts is exalted by judgment,/the Holy God proved holy by retribution" (Isa. 5:16). We have here a new approach to the concept of holiness. Before Isaiah's time, the concept of holiness is mentioned in the Priestly Torah only with regard to ritual matters: the holy Temple, the holy days, the priests as holy people. Not once in the Priestly Torah is holiness tied to moral behavior, to upholding social

---

[130] Kugler, pp. 10-11.
[131] Kugler, p. 16.

justice, and to behaving righteously. Some scholars claim that
through prophecy the notion of holiness took on moral meaning,
but Isaiah is the only one of the eighth-century prophets who
infuses holiness with morality. Isaiah's new idea of holiness is
also reflected in the writings of a new Priestly school, called the
Holiness School, which was most likely founded at about this
time.[132]

Knohl's challenge to the dating of the Documentary Hypothesis (where P was the latest

text) has not been uniformly accepted. Nonetheless, for the sake of presenting his

analysis, the change was stunning and immediate. According to the Priestly Torah, there

was no relationship between morality and ritual. However,

> There was a need for creative and powerful innovation from
> within the Priestly camp, both in order to heal the ills of the
> people and to respond to the prophetic critique [of Amos, Micah,
> and Isaiah] …. [t]he most central aspect of this innovation has to
> do with the relations between morality and religious ritual.
> Whereas the classical Priestly conception maintained a rigid
> distinction between the two, the Holiness School combines
> morality and ritual …. it is not only the priests but the entire
> people of Israel who are called upon to be holy.[133]

Surprisingly, the Holiness School did not simply choose either ritual or ethics.

Instead, they placed the two side-by-side:

> The offering of sacrifices, alongside an interdiction against
> defrauding and prohibitions against unfair commerce; a
> command to keep the Sabbath and the holy days alongside
> decrees to honor one's father and mother and to care for the
> needy. The underlying idea is that if practitioners want to be
> holy, they must simultaneously maintain the ritual
> commandments and pay attention to the moral injunctions.
> Working for social justice, caring for the poor and the weak,
> loving fellow human beings, all these are part of the concept of
> holiness, according to the Holiness School.[134]

---

[132] Knohl (2003), p. 63.
[133] Knohl (2003), pp. 64-5.
[134] Knohl (2003), p. 65.

So we can see that there was a notable difference between Isaiah and the Holiness School. Whereas "Isaiah, like the other prophets of his era, is thoroughly critical of the religious rituals of his time, the Holiness School does not criticize the ritual aspect of religion at all; on the contrary, its adherents fully embrace the ritual, but emphasize the close affinity of ritual and morality as components of holiness."[135]

It is clear from Knohl, then, that morality and the cult represent two separate – but to the Priests both important – types of holiness (even as the H material brings them together). We might still ask, however, "whether cultic and ethical obligations merely coexist as two sorts of requirements that Yahweh has imposed, or whether they are linked by some inner connection."[136] On the surface, "Leviticus presents two faces. Its earlier chapters are likely to seem incomprehensible, repulsive and offensive …. [t]he book's later chapters, by contrast, display a commitment to ethical values that strikes for us a much more positive note."[137] Forgetting for a moment Anthony Cothey's less than sophisticated dichotomy, what brings these elements together is that the editors of Leviticus saw its contents as highly integrated in order to present a practical theodicy: "it is not concerned with detailed analysis of the causes of wrongdoing and misfortune – it is sufficient to note that these happen and have widespread repercussions – but rather with God-given means of dealing with it."[138] In other words, both the ethical and cultic elements combine into a system of holiness that allows adherents to deal with and move beyond misfortune in their lives.

---

[135] Knohl (2003), pp. 65-6.
[136] Cothey, p. 131.
[137] Cothey, pp. 131-2.
[138] Cothey, p. 148.

Striving vs. Conferring

One question that arises out of the discussion about cultic vs. ethical holiness is how we, as human beings, attain holiness. Baruch Schwartz recognizes that there are two primary possibilities – either holiness is conferred upon us or we strive for it. The first opinion, espoused outside the priestly tradition and most strongly in the Deuteronomic vision, is that "Israel's holiness is genetic, passed on biologically to the descendants of Abraham."[139] His primary clue is that *q.d.sh.* is predominantly followed by "*l-*" meaning "to." The root indicating holiness, then, means "to be designated to the deity, to belong to Him .... holiness is the status itself; it was conferred upon [Israel] by YHWH, when He chose them from among the nations of the world, and the obligation to obey his commands derives from it."[140]

On the other hand, the Priestly text provides a very different understanding. This tradition "speaks of a defined group of objects which are conceived of as the 'personal property' of the deity. These are known as the *qodasim*, and the modifier *qados* 'holy' is used in P only of them and of YHWH Himself. Only one of the *qodasim*, the name of YHWH, is intrinsically holy; the rest become *qodasim* as a result of being declared such."[141] Even if this is true, we also find that

> There is yet another way in which an object can become holy in
> priestly thought. By inadvertently entering the tabernacle
> precincts, a common object not previously destined to become
> holy becomes *ipso facto* sanctified; this is expressed by the
> intransitive verb *qadas*: to become a *qodes*. This is so because the
> very presence of God in His earthly dwelling – which P refers to
> as YHWH's *kabod* – automatically exudes holiness, turning

---

[139] Schwartz, p. 51.
[140] Schwartz, p. 52.
[141] Schwartz, p. 53.

whatever is present into *qodes*, as stated explicitly in Exod 29:43-44: "… it will be sanctified by My Presence. I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will sanctify Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests."[142]

Regardless which method is used, the important part is that as opposed to the non-priestly material, people and objects may become holy rather than being so inherently.

In order to further clarify the differences between these two positions, Schwartz tells us that in the Priestly world,

> All reality divides into two categories: the holy and the common. This is true of Israel's population, which is divided into priest (and, temporarily, Nazirites) and everyone else. It is true of space: the world is divided into the divine abode (the tabernacle) and everywhere else. It holds for time as well: eternity is divided into holy days and all other days. And it is equally true of objects: the material world is divided into what has been offered to the deity (sacrificial gifts) and everything else. It is even true of speech: all words are divided into the utterances including the Tetragrammaton (such as oaths and vows taken by uttering it) and everything else. In each case, the first category, the holy, is what belongs to God. Throughout the priestly texts too, though not in every single one, *qds* is followed by the preposition "to", and the holy items are spoken of as YHWH's belongings: "My sabbaths" (Exod 31:13; Lev 19:3, 30; 26:2; cf. 23:38), "My festivals" (Lev 23:2; cf. 23:4, 27), "My abode" (Lev 15:31; 26:11; cf. 17:4, etc), "My sanctuary" (Lev 19:30; 20:3; 26:2; cf. 21:12; Num 19:20), "My holy name" (Lev 20:3; 22:2; 22:32).[143]

This notion is not surprising taken on its own. In fact, priestly thought outside of H confined holiness to such items as priests, the tabernacle and its implements, offerings, specific times and God's name. In H, however, the concept grew to encompass all of Israel, "as if to say: all of humanity too is divided into the holy (Israel) and the common (everyone else) …. YHWH turns Israel into a holy object, His personal possession, in the same way that He sanctifies the tabernacle and the priests: by exuding holiness, that is, by

---

[142] Schwartz, p. 53.
[143] Schwartz, pp. 53-4.

virtue of His very presence in their midst. From the moment He took up residence in His

earthly abode according to H, the holiness which He exuded began to radiate upon Israel

as a whole, making them His."[144] But the importance comes when we compare this basic

priestly notion to the idea – found in non-priestly texts – that Israel went through a

change in status, becoming holy at one time in history. This flies in the face of the

priestly texts, in which "God sanctifies Israel – the verb is always in the participial form –

constantly, by virtue of His enduring, abiding presence. Priestly thought perceives

Israel's holiness not as an historical event but as a dynamic process, always taking

place."[145]

In the Priestly sense, Israel's task is to sanctify itself (*wehitqaddistem*), literally to

make themselves into holy objects. In a series of texts (including Lev 11:44-45; 19:2;

20:7, 26; Num 15:40), Israel is not simply holy, but must achieve that condition: "Rather

than saying that Israel *is* holy, these texts say that Israel is *commanded to be* holy.

Holiness is not conferred, it is an obligation, and it is Israel's task to achieve it."[146]

Schwartz's important analysis may be summarized this way:

> In the non-priestly view, Israel's holiness is the very fact of its
> election; in the priestly view it is an emanation of the divine
> nature which turns Israel into a sacred object. In the non-priestly
> notion, Israel's holiness was bequeathed to it from on high, an
> expression of YHWH's transcendence and His sovereignty over
> all peoples; in the priestly conception it radiates to them as a
> result of His presence in their midst, an expression of His
> immanence. In the non-priestly texts, Israel became holy, that is,
> was chosen, at a specific point in time, and this holiness is passed
> on genetically; the priestly texts proclaim that Israel becomes
> holy constantly. In E and D, Israel's holiness was conferred upon
> it, a dispensation of grace; in H Israel's holiness is a quality to be
> acquired: God exudes is, but they are charged with actively

---

[144] Schwartz, pp. 54-5.
[145] Schwartz, p. 55.
[146] Schwartz, p. 55.

attaining it, and unless they do so it is not theirs. In the non-priestly view, Israel's holiness is an expression of privileged status; in the priestly view, an expression of Israel's utter subservience. Both traditions associate Israel's holiness with its duty to comply with the whole of the commandments. But whereas the non-priestly texts see holiness as the precondition, resulting in the necessity to uphold the commandments, for H compliance with the commandments is the precondition, resulting in holiness. Both traditions entertain the theoretical possibility that Israel's holiness can be revoked: in the non-priestly idea, God can rescind His election of Israel if they let Him down; in the priestly view, the divine Presence can depart, making holiness no longer attainable.[147]

Priestly Holiness vs. Prophetic Holiness vs. the Holiness of the Sages

Schwartz does an excellent job of distilling the fundamental issue that there are major differences between Priestly and non-priestly conceptions of holiness. His analysis differs from John Grammie, who takes the analysis to another level. He proposes that the concept of holiness is different in the priestly concept, the prophetic understanding, and in the wisdom literature. His argument hinges on the understanding that "the holiness of God requires a cleanness on the part of human beings, but each of the three major traditions (Priestly, Prophetic, Wisdom Literature) stresses a different kind of cleanness .... underlying diverse perceptions (that holiness requires a *different* response) there is also a unity (*cleanness* is the proper counterpart of holiness)."[148] More specifically, Grammie argues that

> To the authors of the priestly tradition, the Holy God extended a call to ritual purity, right sacrifices, separation. To the prophets, holiness clearly issued the summons for the purity of *social* justice and equity in human relations .... investigation into the wisdom psalms and the Book of Job yielded the positive answer

[147] Schwartz, pp. 58-9.
[148] Grammie, p. 1.

that for the sapiential traditions as well the holiness of God calls
forth cleanness; the particular stress of the wisdom tradition is
that holiness requires the cleanness of *individual* morality.[149]

It will be important for us to determine specifically how he reached each of these

conclusions.

PRIESTLY

To begin with, Grammie notes that the notion of separation is pervasive in the

priestly traditions of the Bible, beginning with the Book of Genesis[150] This idea of

separation becomes apparent in the priestly treatment of the dietary laws. For them,

"cleanness depends upon the dual principles of: (1) separation, segregation, division, and

(2) conformity to the norm established for each class, element, or division."[151] This is

important because the Priests, as opposed to the Prophets and Sages, put an undue stress

on the differentiation between what is holy and what is not. Their theology "strongly

endorses clear differentiation between priests and laity and in turn favors singling out one

individual priest above others to have access to an area designated as the most holy ....

God is the one who sanctifies tent, altar, and priests. Indeed, the former is set apart, made

holy, not so much by human action but by the presence and glory of God."[152]

This principle of separation was important in matters of time, as well. For the

Priests, keeping the Sabbath "serves as a declaration, a sign of Israel's knowledge of the

source of her holiness; the keeping of Sabbath is a symbol of Israel's awareness of it."[153]

At other important times, such as death, birth, and ordination, the priestly theology of

---

[149] Grammie, p. 2.
[150] Grammie, p. 9.
[151] Grammie, p. 10.
[152] Grammie, pp. 16-7.
[153] Grammie, p. 21.

holiness was dominated by the principle of separation. These events require specific

ceremonial rites to mark the passage from one status to another.[154]

Clearly, the Priestly conception of holiness is not limited to merely cultic

concerns. We see that

> Not only are proper attitudes and duties toward fellow human
> beings enumerated in this chapter as the requirements of holiness
> but also proper duties and attitudes toward God …. Bamberger
> was entirely correct in affirming that the priests see holiness "as
> aspiration and task to be approached through a disciplined life."
> It is thus altogether misleading and a caricature of the priestly
> understanding of holiness to reduce it to a set of rules pertaining
> to purity …. "the ethical component of holiness is not for the
> priestly writers of the Holiness Code a mere extra."[155]

Nonetheless, the Priests have often been faulted for their exclusive system. Although

ethical requirements of holiness made up an important element in the priestly model,

many scholars have emphasized the self-serving nature of their theology to the holiness

of the priests themselves as a class:

> Leenhardt [F.J., *La Notion de Saintete dans l'Ancien Testament*,
> Paris, 1929] argued that the sacerdotal conception in effect was
> that holiness constituted a priestly privilege. Indeed, the clergy
> depended – in Israel as elsewhere – on the "fiction" of a reserved
> zone into which the people could not penetrate without danger
> …. [t]he clergy sought to develop the notion of separation,
> isolation, and exclusivity in the idea of holiness. The holy object
> which was originally the divine object could not be given to all,
> but only to specialists. It would constitute a danger for others.[156]

The priests likely ignored this critique, as they attempted to balance the issue of

cleanness with their principle of separation: "Only those animals were pronounced clean

for eating which conformed to appropriate form and means of locomotion in each realm.

Thus too, the notion of separation carried over to priestly thinking about holy place

---

[154] Grammie, p. 32.
[155] Grammie, p. 34.
[156] Grammie, p. 41.

(sanctuary), holy times (Sabbath, rites of passage, and holy convocations), holy persons (nation, priests, and Levites)."[157] This human necessity to restore cleanness fits into the Priestly "vision of a creator, ordering God, transcendent and majestic in holiness, who required of his people an inner integrity (Gen. 17:1), humanitarian conduct (Lev. 19), as well as maintenance of a ritualistic purity."[158]

The Priestly idea does not end with the priests themselves. Instead, the other texts which carry forward these traditions, such as Ezekiel and the Chronicles, retain a strong continuity with this "normative priestly understanding of holiness. The holiness of God continued to impress itself on the Israelite priestly tradition as requiring the cleanness of ritual accompanied with the appropriate sacrifices, Sabbath observance, and the implementation of the principles of separation."[159]

PROPHETIC

Although the prophets presumably inherited the priestly understanding of holiness, their conception of God's holiness "did not require the cleanness of ritual first and foremost – but it did require cleanness."[160] I have previously noted that Isaiah provides the most salient conception of holiness within the Prophets, but many scholars have looked past this and underestimated the impact of holiness on prophetic thought. Grammie claims that

> Though the title Holy One of Israel suggests an ethnocentricity in
> Isaiah's proclamations, divine holiness, divine kingship, an
> divine passion for justice extend to all the earth, which is the
> divine's 'glorious possession' (Isa. 6:3). In this affirmation of

---

[157] Grammie, p. 43.
[158] Grammie, pp. 43-4.
[159] Grammie, p. 69.
[160] Grammie, p. 72.

> God as being sovereign in the double sense of being both holy
> and just, Isaiah shows himself to be very much in the line of the
> ancient traditions on which he draws.[161]

He presents Isaiah as an exemplar of the prophets, and suggests that we can ascertain

seven independent elements to Isaiah's doctrine of holiness. Although this analysis

overlaps in some facets with the one previously presented in chapter four, it is duly noted

here specifically for the contrast which Grammie indicates between it and the writings of

the priests and sages:

1. Reverence and a sense of the need for cleanness are the most immediate and lasting products of the prophet's encounter with holiness ... awareness of uncleanness, reverence, fear are the prophet's most immediate responses to holiness .... [i]niquity (guilt) and sin are not handled through sacrifices but by way of a divine emissary's direct intervention (Isa. 6:6-7) .... Isaiah's doctrine of the primacy of faith (Isa. 7:9; 28:16) is closely related to his doctrine of holiness: strength comes from trust in the Holy One of Israel (Isa 30:15), from relying on his counsel rather than from trusting in alliances with the militarily strong (Isa. 31:1) .... [Isaiah] unmistakably teaches that the cleanness the divine required could not be attained simply through a reliance upon divine grace, but necessitated action outside the cultus (Isa. 1:13a, 15-16).[162]

2. Social and legal justice is the primary means by which the cleanness required of holiness can be attained but even this, the prophet taught, was not to be viewed solely as a human accomplishment .... Isaiah's doctrine of justice and righteousness is intricately intertwined with his doctrines of place, the king, and holiness .... Yahweh's beloved vineyard of Israel, Judah, and Jerusalem comes under the divine judgment because of failure to produce justice and righteousness (Isa. 5:1-7) .... [j]ustice ... is held up as the appointed means by which the cleanness required of the divine holiness can be achieved by human beings (Isa. 1:16-7) .... God manifests the divine holiness by moving human beings to perform righteous acts .... God hallows, that is, the divine sanctifies and makes humans fit to continue to stand in the holy presence by leading them to perform social and legal acts of appropriate purity.[163]

3. Glory, sovereignty, counsel, and power are not simply abstract correlative qualities or attributes of the divine holiness. Rather, each attribute also points to an aspect of human life which the divine desires to hallow.[164]

4. The holiness of God for Isaiah is not simply punitive or retributive but above all purposive and purgative .... [j]ust as human beings used different instruments

---

[161] Grammie, p. 79.

[162] Grammie, pp. 80-2.

[163] Grammie, pp. 83-6.

[164] Grammie, p. 86.

with which to thresh dill, cumin, and grain, so was God's judgment adjusted – harsh but not such as to crush utterly (Isa. 28:27-9) .... the holiness of judgment is as a consuming fire [pruning necessary for full growth].[165]

5. The remnant is holy .... that this meaning attaches to 'holy' is most apparent from the words of the prophet and disciples (Isa. 6:13 which ends The holy seed is its stump in some versions).[166]

6. There is a paradoxical, dialectical, and sometimes dialogical feature in Isaiah's doctrine of holiness not only with respect to manifestation and hiddenness, loftiness and caring, but also with respect to divine versus human initiative and a Zion-parochialism versus universalism .... The Holy One of Israel is both hurt and aggrieved at the rejection experienced (Isa. 1:4; 5:18-19, 24; 30:8-14). Holiness for Isaiah is thus far removed from disinterestedness and detachment. Exaltedness does not mean apathy but sympathy born of the deepest caring for humankind and for the victims of oppression (Isa. 5:1-7) .... [t]he paradox of holiness in Isa. 5:16b is thus dialectic: wherever human beings have been motivated to perform acts of righteousness and justice, therein the Holy One has made manifest holiness .... the fourth paradox of holiness pertains to place. God manifests himself in glory and holiness to Isaiah in Zion. Yet that revelation is not provincial in character or restricted in relevance to the temple alone; rather, in Zion Isaiah learns that the fullness of the whole earth is the glory, that is, the possession of the Lord of hosts (Isa. 6:3).[167]

7. Holiness calls ... encounter with holiness is not an end in itself. Rather, holiness summons, invites, directs, and commands .... [t]he specific vocations of holiness vary according to the audience. The divine holiness calls human beings to wisdom, nobility, and cleanness, to understanding, fidelity, justice/judgment, and righteousness.[168]

The ideas of Isaiah evolve within the book, of course. We find that for Deutero-Isaiah, "the holiness of the divine king connotes not only justice and righteousness but creation and redemption as well."[169] And Trito-Isaiah, further universalizes the concept of holiness by completing "an astonishing democratization of the formerly exclusive sacerdotal office (Isa. 56:6-7) ... thus the universalism of the theology of holiness already

---

[165] Grammie, pp. 89-90.
[166] Grammie, p. 91.
[167] Grammie, pp. 92-5.
[168] Grammie, p. 96.
[169] Grammie, p. 98.

inchoate in Isaiah of Jerusalem (Isa. 6:7) has been remarkably developed by his

successors."[170]

Isaiah is only one example of prophetic writing, but emblematic in its use of the

holy. Grammie demonstrates that "in contradistinction to the priests of Israel, the

prophets clearly taught that the holiness of God required the cleanness of social

justice."[171] And while he conveniently ignores the important reality that notions of

holiness vary even within the prophets, Grammie uses the analysis of Isaiah to add to his

primary hypothesis, that "despite a unity of vision of the holiness of God, each of the

three major groups of religious functionaries in ancient Israel – priest, prophets, and

sages – taught that a different kind of cleanness was required by that holiness."[172]

SAGES

Grammie believes that "in several regards the writers of Israelite wisdom

[Proverbs, Wisdom Psalms, and Job] showed a greater consistency in their understanding

of holiness than did the writers in the prophetic tradition."[173] From the earliest writings,

the old wisdom tradition believes in a "wondrous ability of the divine to know – which

includes also a knowledge of the perverse in mind (Prov. 14:2), lying lips (Prov. 12:22),

the one of devious ways (Prov. 14:2), and the inmost human spirit (Prov. 16:2; 21:2) –

thus unmistakably belongs to the sapiential understanding of what constitutes the divine

uniqueness and holiness."[174] One important example can be seen in Psalm 15, where

---

[170] Grammie, pp. 99-100.
[171] Grammie, p. 100.
[172] Grammie, p. 102.
[173] Grammie, p. 125.
[174] Grammie, p. 127.

> The requirements of holiness are identified as residing in acts of
> individual morality .... [i]ts language indicates not one who is
> setting down external conditions to be applied to prospective
> worshipers, but rather the profound awareness on the part of its
> author of the individual conduct and attitude the divine holiness
> required of him if he would abide in its presence .... "the holy
> hill" should not be associated exclusively with the geographical
> location of Mt. Zion. Rather, Zion is itself a symbol of a different
> kind of existence, marked by closeness to God .... [t]he sage has
> set down a Decalogue of requirements for individual integrity
> and morality for the one who would continue to abide before the
> divine holiness.[175]

The argument is made even more clear in Psalm 24, which "has summarized very well

the requirements of holiness according to the sages in these words: 'Who shall ascend the

hill of the Lord?/And who shall stand in his holy place?/The one who has clean hands and

a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false, and does not swear deceitfully'

(Ps. 24:4). The holiness of God requires of would-be worshipers the purity of individual

integrity and truthfulness."[176]

> It is apparent that

> Israel's sages responsible for Proverbs, the Wisdom Psalms, and
> Job placed a distinctive emphasis on the requirement of the
> cleanness of individual morality and integrity before God ...
> along with the theme of individual morality required for holiness,
> we observed how the theme of fascination with the divine
> omniscience and the theme that the fear of God leads to life were
> also distinctive and persistent aspects in the sages' understanding
> of holiness.[177]

The overarching reality according to Grammie is that "holiness encountered in

Israel had the overpowering effect of impressing on heart and consciousness the need for

inner cleansing and purity .... for the entire Old Testament/Hebrew scriptures, holiness

summoned Israel to cleanness. A unity of the Old Testament can be discerned in this

---

[175] Grammie, pp. 132-3.
[176] Grammie, p. 133.
[177] Grammie, p. 149.

unified response to holiness on the part of Israel: holiness requires purity."[178] Within this

reality, however, "diversity within unity is to be discerned from the fact that for the

different groups of religious persons within Israel – prophets, priests, and sages – the kind

of cleanness required by holiness varied. For the prophets it was a cleanness of social

justice, for the priests a cleanness of proper ritual and maintenance of separation, for the

sages it was a cleanness of inner integrity and individual moral acts."[179]

P vs. D

Eyal Regev follows in the footsteps of these previous arguments, each of which

deigns to differentiate the ways various texts within *Tanakh* define holiness. For Regev, a

clear distinction is set up between the Priestly texts and those of Deuteronomic origin.

Although we have previously noted Knohl's convincing argument that P and H are

radically different, though related, texts, "for the purpose of the following discussion, P

and H are viewed as one school with relatively coherent theological and cultic

perceptions."[180] For Regev, the core idea of holiness differs in the Priestly Schools and in

Deuteronomy. The Priestly sources view holiness "as dynamic, sensitive, and dangerous,

with limited access to the sacred. In contrast, in Deuteronomy holiness is static and

access to the sacred is far less restricted since it is not dangerous or threatening. In other

words, in Deuteronomy holiness is not an active entity but a status."[181]

---

[178] Grammie, p. 195.
[179] Grammie, pp. 195-6.
[180] Regev, p. 243.
[181] Regev, p. 244.

The import of this distinction comes in a number of cultic and legal variations

between the P and D texts, which Regev presents as 10 major differences:

- While the disposition of the sacred space and its function are one of the major concerns of the Priestly Schools, in Deuteronomy there is an emphasis on non-cultic institutions, viz. jurisprudence, warfare and the authority of the king.[182]

- In contrast to the Priestly Schools, in Deuteronomy the compliance with the divine will and the attainment of reward are performed through the study of the law, practice of daily commands and education, and not primarily through rituals and cultic acts.[183]

- The Priestly Schools see the priests, especially the high priest, as holy people .... Deuteronomy, however, emphasizes the holiness of all the People of Israel, while the central role of the priests is substantially diminished.[184]

- In Deuteronomy all the people of Israel are more involved in the cultic experience .... The rituals in Deuteronomy bear a popular character, and their main feature is prayer and confession. This is contrasted to the "sanctuary of silence" in the Priestly Code, when the ritual is practiced by the priests and sacrifices are the focal feature of religion, while the worshiper is somewhat excluded from the cult. In the Priestly Schools the contact of the common people with the sacred and their experience of holiness are limited, and their prayer and religious feelings remain unnoticed.[185]

- The destructive force of impurity is extremely emphasized in the Priestly Schools. Pollution endangers the sanctuary since it violates its holiness. The purpose of the extensive purity interdictions is to restrict the causes of impurity from the sacred space, sacred people and sacred objects. Not only does ritual impurity such as carcass and skin disease can pollute the person and the sanctuary. Sexual transgressions regarding incest, menstruation, etc, as well as certain immoral behavior impair the sacred, also desecrate the holy and violate the holiness of the person and even the holiness of the land of Israel. In contrast, Deuteronomy's concept of pollution is less strict and cautious. In Deuteronomy, the purity-like restrictions are not as numerous and comprehensive as in Lev.-Num. and most of them do not concern the Temple cult and the priestly realm .... instead of impurity we find in Deuteronomy "an abomination", *to'ebah*, that is, intolerable filth, both physically repulsive and morally disgraceful. It is an obligation which holiness imposes on the people of Israel.[186]

- Abomination [in Deuteronomy] is something faulty or flawed, but since its implications are not given, it is possible that it does not really affect the sacred or endanger the holy .... abominations [in the Holiness Code] pollute the

---

[182] Regev, pp. 245-6.
[183] Regev, p. 246.
[184] Regev, pp. 246-7.
[185] Regev, p. 248.
[186] Regev, pp. 248-9.

transgressor as well as the land, and the former will be punished by being cut off from his people (*karet*). Hence, the *to'ebah* is not a mere abstract and general category, as in the case of Deuteronomy. It has a powerful defiling and damaging force. It pollutes the land of Israel and destroys the sinner himself.[187]

- According to the priestly concept of the tabernacle, the heavenly glory is situated in the tabernacle, in a cloud. This holiness might be threatening and dangerous if one approaches it in improper fashion .... [i]n Deuteronomy, however, it is not the heavenly holiness that dwells in the Sanctuary, but only God's name. The divine presence itself cannot be localized nor reduced to a certain place, even if it is the most holy place. Hence, in Deuteronomy the human (or priestly) contact with the Holy is less direct in comparison to the Priestly Schools.[188]

- In the Priestly Schools, there is a significant theological and narrative correlation between the commands regarding the observance of the Sabbath and the building of the tabernacle. This relationship between sacred time and sacred space emphasizes the holiness of the Sabbath and implies that it is not an abstract heavenly concept ... the Sabbath [in PS] is equated to other holy or sacred things. The Sabbath in Deuteronomy is totally different, since it is not introduced as holy in relation to the temple. Though it is also called "Sabbath to YHWH your God", it is introduced as a social institute. Deuteronomy stresses the human and moral character of the seventh day as a day of rest of all the members of the household, especially the servants and household animals.[189]

- In the PS (especially in H), the people of Israel are sanctified in a continual process. This sanctification is practiced by Israel's observance of the given commands. For the people of Israel, holiness is an ongoing mandatory obligation and a divine destiny to realize their potential holiness and their divine inspiration in their daily life and ritual .... [i]n Deuteronomy, in contrast, the holiness of the people of Israel is a fact or status. Their holiness is a consequence of God's election of Israel, not of their adherence of His commands (e.g. Deut xxvi 18-19).[190]

- The Priestly Schools reflect a theocentric perception while Deuteronomy expresses an anthropocentric perception. The PS view the main essence of Israel's life in the divine presence in the tabernacle, whereas Deuteronomy emphasizes the religious needs and feelings of the common Israelite. Weinfield has described this tendency of Deuteronomy as "secularization" while the PS are characteristic of a "regime of holiness and taboo".[191]

---

[187] Regev, p. 250.
[188] Regev, p. 251.
[189] Regev, pp. 250-1.
[190] Regev, pp. 252-3.
[191] Regev, pp. 253-4.

This impressive list of distinctions between P and D conceptions of holiness help us enumerate two fundamentally different reactions to the holy. Since holiness in P is dynamic,

> [a]ny contact with that holiness must be cautious and gradual. Since the priests are sanctified and they have a special status in the holiness spectrum, they should be those who perform the activities and ceremonies that maintain that holiness in the tabernacle and they should protect it. Impurity, however, endangers that holiness .... [I]n Deuteronomy, the concept of holiness and its characteristics are quite distinct. Holiness is not an independent entity; one may even go further and claim that it is only a quality. It is a static situation or a sort of legal status, as the case of the holiness of the people of Israel, which is a permanent situation, demonstrates. Indeed, it is the theological and perhaps even the legal base for the covenant between God the people of Israel, but nothing more. In contrast to the PS, in Deuteronomy the holy is not a barometer of Israel's ongoing behavior and obedience. Since holiness is only a static situation or the status of persons or a nation in relation to God, there is no reason to keep it so restricted and isolated from the common and profane, as in the PS. Thus, the laity have relatively open access to the temple, whereas the importance and sacredness of the priests and the rituals seem to be decreased. Under these circumstances, the cautious sacred taboos seem less relevant.[192]

In terms of ramifications,

> It seems that the quality of holiness – dynamic or static – actually determines the character of the religious and cultic system. The attitude towards sacred space, the identity of those who are permitted to approach the sancta and perform the rituals and those who are excluded from them, and in our case, even the concept of the Sabbath are all affected by the perception of holiness. Thus, the difference between dynamic and static holiness shapes the distinct notions of cult, ritual and religious ideas in the PS and Deuteronomy ..., [s]ince God is the ultimate source of holiness, it is only natural that the typology of holiness would be inspired by human beliefs concerning the way God acts and rules His world.[193]

---

[192] Regev, pp. 254-5.
[193] Regev, pp. 256-7.

Response

Attempting to sort out the myriad ways in which holiness is presented in *Tanakh*

is not an easy task, given the tremendous breadth of interpretive visions presented by

various scholars. In fact, after analyzing a number of these basic ideas, it becomes clear

that the concept of holiness itself fluctuates throughout the text. Jenson, for example,

provides one of the more creative systems in his concept of "graded holiness." His

holiness spectrum expands the concept of holiness in Leviticus by including cleanliness

and even uncleanliness (or purity and impurity) within the same umbrella, while at the

same time narrowing the focus of holiness by excluding its oft-claimed antonym, *hol*. By

doing so, he is reconceptualizing holiness in a similar fashion to the way scientists think

about cold and heat. In scientific terms, there is no such thing as cold; there is either heat

or an absence of heat. For Jenson, there is not really holy or "not-holy"; rather, there are

simply varying levels of holiness ranging from most holy (*k'dosh k'doshim*) to least holy

(*tameh*). Unclean, then, is neither an antonym nor a prerequisite for holiness, it is merely

a lack of holiness. Jenson's work is compelling, even as it is very different from most

conceptions of holiness. In terms of the present study, the most important element in

Jenson's work is the fact that holiness is not so simple as to be either present or not

present. Based on his conclusions, we cannot speak of a person, object, time, or place as

simply being holy; we must be more selective in our terminology and begin to label such

people, objects, times or places with a degree of holiness.

Even if Jenson is correct, the biblical text leaves us wanting for more information.

While Jenson points out a multitude of examples where holiness is described in varying

degrees, there are many more example where holiness is merely described as present. As a result, it will be difficult for us to make distinctions about degrees of holiness in many situations. Still, it is a difficulty we cannot ignore as a result of this theory.

In a similar vein, there is a distinction between the cultic use of holiness and the moral use of holiness within *Tanakh*. Unfortunately, some scholars have made this division too simplistic. As previously discussed in Chapter Four, the distinction between the P material in Leviticus 1-16 and the H material in Leviticus 17-26 is not stark. More important than the question of which material belongs to which writer(s), though, is the clear fact that there is a difference between holiness used in a cultic sense and holiness used in a moral sense. There is abundant material linking holiness to all things related to the cult. Temple implements, the environs of the Temple, priests who work in the Temple – all possess a measure of holiness. It is easy to see why early analysts argued that holiness was merely a way to describe these things which had to do with worship of God. However, it is just as clear from the text that ethical commandments are given in relation to the dictate "be holy" (e.g. Lev. 19:2). In this case, holiness has nothing to do with those people or objects involved in the sacrificial worship, it is for all Israel. Cothey's argument, then, seems to provide a nice denouement to the question of cult vs. morality when he claims that holiness in these two arenas may actually have something to do with one another in addressing the difficult parts of our lives.

When we turn to the argument about whether Israel must strive for holiness or whether God confers it upon Israel, we find ourselves in tension with previous theories. While Schwartz overstates his case by claiming that holiness is "genetic" even as he admits that this very holiness may be withdrawn by God, his analysis contradicts the

position of Cothey and many others who note that Israel works toward holiness in either an ethical or ritual matter. And if holiness is conferred upon us by God in the Deuteronomic text as a result of our chosenness, it would call into question Jenson's claim that holiness is a matter of degree (assuming we can extend his argument outside its Leviticus context). Although these paradigms are very different, it is crucial to remember that they stem from different places in the text. Jenson and Cothey, among others, base their arguments primarily on Priestly materials. And even though Schwartz claims that the Priestly texts compel us to strive for holiness in our actions, his argument about conferred holiness arises from the Deuteronomic text. And while he focuses on question of whether holiness is static or dynamic, Regev also presents an argument for how holiness has a different nature in either the Priestly or the Deuteronomic texts. All of this bolsters our growing realization that holiness is not a simple matter in *Tanakh*. Even such competing claims can be supported by referring to different parts of the text.

Expanding on this idea, Grammie's analysis delves more deeply into the differences between the primary texts within *Tanakh*: priestly, prophetic, and wisdom. In his analysis, each major section of the biblical text offers a different path to achieving holiness. In this sense, he is in line with the idea that Israel strives for holiness rather than having it conferred. At the same time, his conception paints in broad strokes and does not allow for variations within texts. For example, he leans heavily on Isaiah to build his argument about the prophetic path to holiness, but fails to realize that there are varying conceptions within the prophetic writings. He also seems to lump the entire Pentateuch from Genesis onward into his Priestly model, which does not comport either with the text itself or with a theories such as those presented by Schwartz and Regev about the

different nature of a Deuteronomic text. Grammie's argument does, however, help in our exploration of what it means to achieve holiness. His presentation of three very different methods within *Tanakh* leaves us with an understanding once again that there is more than one path to holiness. In this case, ritual purity, social justice, and individual morality are all important in a biblical sense. Perhaps it is not necessary, after all, to choose from among competing paradigms – there is more than one way to achieve holiness, or to understand what it accomplishes.

Chapter 6:
Holiness as a "social tool"

Recognizing now that there are multiple views about the nature of holiness within the *Tanakh*, as well as multiple interpretations of these views, it is possible to move on to the critical question of, "why?" What is the function or purpose of holiness? More recently, a group of scholars led by Mary Douglas, has begun to approach this material through a very different lens. Rather than taking an emic perspective, as many of our previous scholars have, she asks different questions in taking an etic, or external, approach to the function of this material. Douglas, an anthropologist by training, has attempted to discern the purpose of a number of biblical concepts – including holiness – based on their utility as social tools. *Tanakh*, in her estimation, is not merely a religious book, but a prescription for society. One contemporary teacher says that "when the Torah tells us to be holy, it is not supplying us with an end which represents a significant goal in its own right, it is instead providing us with a strategy to achieve the real goals of our mission as Jews."[194] Is it possible that all along holiness was a pragmatic tool, used by various writers to present their world-view, ensure a coherent society, and encourage people to act in certain ways?

Diamond holds on to a God-centered view of holiness and represents the explicit biblical view in offering the goal of a prosperous society as an explanation for holiness:

> The goal of the biblical system of holiness and purity is to remain consistent with God's order (which, for them, was self-evidently true) and, in so doing, to maintain a positive, productive relationship with God …. [b]y doing so, not only will God be assuaged, God will also grant rain in its season, an abundance of

---

[194] Mayer, "Parsha Themes."

crops and cattle and many children. These are the highest joys of
the authors and their ultimate goal. Holiness and purity are the
direct means to prosperity and happiness.[195]

Douglas, however, begins by taking note of Knohl and Milgrom's work in that

"the priestly writer of the first part of Leviticus did not spontaneously support ethical

principles. P's idea of holiness did not entail righteousness; he would have been surprised

when Isaiah spoke of holiness and righteousness in one breath (Isa 5:16)."[196] She

continues further to imply that the "old" way of holiness was about terror and power and

has been replaced by a "modern" view of holiness which is concerned with care for

individual needs. This is a radical change from previous scholarship. Even scholars, like

Grammie, who confirm that the notion of holiness in the Wisdom Literature was based on

individual action, did not necessarily think the system of holiness was based on a concern

for the individual. It is one thing to say the individual must take certain actions to be

holy, it is quite another to say that the purpose of holiness is to care about the individual.

According to Douglas, the system is put in place in order to define society's

responsibilities! Grossman powerfully concurs in noting that "we are inexchangeable for

any other thing, uninterpretable except in the light of holiness in which we find our place

in the order of the one world, if we are to find our place at all. Holiness, then, presents us

with our freedom as an inference from our existence, not as an enigma (there is no

mystery) but as a problem – the inaugural problem of culture altogether. It neither

consoles nor promises, but sets the terms of the work."[197]

Douglas takes particular interest in the danger of the holy space, such as the

mountain in Exodus 19:10-24, when God was about to hand down the 10

---

[195] Diamond, pp. 101-2
[196] Douglas, p. 129.
[197] Grossman, p. 397.

Commandments. Interestingly, "the danger is two-edged: the people might break through or the Lord might break out, and in either case, people will die. This is the effect of holiness. The holy thing that is not correctly guarded and fenced will break out and kill, and the impure person not correctly prepared for contact with the holy will be killed."[198] Again, the danger related to holiness is about protection – of God, ostensibly, but just as importantly, protecting the individual. Taking it a step further, she notes that another important text (Deut. 7:6) "goes on to say what being holy or reserved to the Lord entails in terms of behavior. It corresponds to the requirements of chastity and fidelity in the discourse of honor and betrothal, which is similar to, or rather, modeled upon the discourse of alliance and covenant."[199] Once again, the common theme is that holiness comes up in a system that is designed to protect individuals and society.

Cothey notes that

> Douglas appears to be right to emphasize that Leviticus conceives of the universe as highly ordered and as exhibiting some sort of moral balance .... Douglas equates this orderliness with moral goodness and with God's justice. It is hardly satisfactory, however, to leave the matter there: a worldview that postulates God's supreme power over a morally balanced universe is evidently going to encounter serious problems when confronted with cases where people experience misfortune and suffering through no fault of their own .... [o]ne potent cause of belief in demons has been the felt need to offer a "theodicy" to cover such cases .... "the theodicy has to be changed. The word 'unclean' affords a theory of pain and suffering free of demons and affords an alternative explanation for bodily afflictions." (citing Douglas, p. 149) .... the cult includes procedures whereby the Israelites can protect themselves from the worst ramifications of any wrongness in which they become entangled.[200]

---

[198] Douglas, p. 146.
[199] Douglas, p. 147.
[200] Cothey, pp. 146-8.

Jenson picks up on Douglas' way of thinking when he says that "the Priestly texts reflect a world-view delineated by taboos and rules of contagion and maintained by sanctions and corrective rituals."[201] The reason for these rules is that "every culture has a particular classification of the world, which is necessary for social coherence and conceptual well-being."[202] Biblical culture in particular, then, developed a world-view centered around holiness in order to help its populace figure out how to live in their world. Regev, too, understood that "the cultic differences between the Priestly Schools and Deuteronomy represent different world-views and from an anthropological point of view, different classifications of the world. These different classifications do not concern the question 'what is holy and what is profane?' Rather, their concern is: what is holiness? How can holiness be perceived? What should one do in order to maintain holiness?"[203]

Focusing more directly on the biblical model, Robert Kugler posits a specific reason for the development of this understanding of holiness. He believes, following Knohl, that the Holiness Code in Leviticus was "made in response to a prophetic critique of P's failure to attend to the situation of ordinary Israelites."[204] This is vitally important, as it may help us determine what it was that this particular biblical conception of holiness was responding to, what it was trying to correct in its society. It is entirely possible that the original Priestly conception of holiness through cult was also meant to fill a need for individuals. Over time, it lost its particular meaning for people, and needed to be replaced by a new system.

---

[201] Jenson, p. 74.
[202] Jenson, p. 76.
[203] Regev, p. 260.
[204] Kugler, p. 4.

According to Kugler, following Douglas's ideas, the view of human impurity was based on: "(1) Impurity results from the entry of foreign entities into the body. (2) Impurity also stems from intrinsically unclean items touching the body. (3) On the other hand things exiting the body can render one impure as well."[205] In the P sections of Leviticus (chapters 1-16),

> The most severe experiences of impurity are ones that would have been seen as the inappropriate loss of life-force from the individual. In spite of the popular belief that uncleanness in P is thought to endanger the holy, contact between the sanctified and impurity never actually damages the holy in Leviticus 1-16. In fact, the opposite seems to be true. Where the concern to separate the holy from the impure is evident (e.g., the removal of the skin-diseased from the midst of the community in Lev. 13:46), it is probably for the protection of the impure person from the effects of the holy. Like many kinds of impurity, holiness can contaminate that with which it comes into contact (Lev. 6:11, 20), but when it is passed to an impure person, death results .... so with respect to the holy, impurity compromises the well-being of its bearer and places him or her at severe risk.[206]

In a fascinating twist, "whereas Leviticus 1-16 conceptualizes impurity as the result of entities touching or breaking the boundaries of the human body, chs. 17-26 conceive of it as the consequence of how one uses the human body."[207] Of course, the effects of impurity are different in the H section of Leviticus:

> In Leviticus 17-26 all of Israel is holy, and so any incursion of impurity meets the sacred head-on from the very beginning; the violator stands no chance of survival. Thus the effect of impurity on the holy is also clear: since holiness is pervasive, any impurity in the land of Israel profanes it. While Leviticus seems to say that holiness, contained as it is within the sanctuary, is largely unaffected by the impurity of the general population, 17-26 regards holiness as much more pervasive, just as powerful, and yet perhaps a bit more fragile.[208]

---

[205] Kugler, p. 14.
[206] Kugler, pp. 14-5.
[207] Kugler, p. 20.
[208] Kugler, p. 20.

Now a truly stunning message of holiness starts to become clear. Kugler remembers that Douglas offers the idea that in terms of the holiness system, the human body is an analogue for the entire community. So when dealing with a violation of bodily boundaries, the system reflects its authors' views of communal boundaries, as well. He beautifully explains the import of a symbolic understanding in this way:

> We have already seen that the authors of Leviticus 1-16 warn against letting entities deemed intrinsically impure enter the body, have contact with the skin, or even touch the clothing, and consider such incursions of impurity mildly distressing; they are reason for a period of waiting, and for laundering and ablution. Meanwhile the impurities resulting from unusual loss of bodily fluids – especially blood and semen – are occasions for much higher concern, if the requirement of sacrifice to remedy the impurity is any measure of its intensity. Hence the inappropriate or unusual loss of life-force from the body is apparently of much deeper concern than the entry of impure matter into it. Correspondingly, if the bodily-impurity system of Leviticus 1-16 is symbolic of society in this regard, then apparently its authors were more worried about losing adherents than they were about external influences undermining their community. If we imagine, again taking our cue from Douglas, that a society's map of the holy parallels that of the purity system, it confirms our insight about what is most important to the authors of Leviticus 1-16 .... even as there is intense concern for things escaping the body, so there is deep worry that items and persons dedicated to the temple remain within its boundaries .... it reflects intense interest in the preservation of what is within the boundaries of the community, and a lesser degree of concern for what might impact the society from the outside. In this way the paradigms of society provided by the notions of holiness and impurity in Leviticus 1-16 are mutually reinforcing maps of a community that perhaps thought itself in danger of extinction by the loss of those within.[209]

The entire system of holiness, according to Kugler's analysis, was designed to protect society from what its authors saw as mortal threats to its existence. In terms of what was described earlier, holiness, then, provided these authors with a method by

---

[209] Kugler, pp. 22-3.

which they could "control" their society and attempt to enforce behavior that they believed would be best for its long-term survival. Specifically,

> If one accepts the notion that a skin disease reflects a threat to one's existence by a loss of life-force from within, it is quite easy to believe that in parallel fashion the holy things of the sanctuary should remain within its boundaries, and that for things to be otherwise might threaten the life of the sanctuary. Second, we observe that acceptance of the rules of the bodily-impurity system drives one to participation in the temple's system of holiness. For instance, if one embraces the idea that the experience of skin disease compromises one's integrity vis-à-vis the holy and endangers the community of which one is a part, then it is quite natural to believe that the rules of the holiness system which require sacrifice to rectify the impurity are good and true. From this perspective it appears that the bodily-impurity system actually functions to support and sustain the temple cult. By establishing in its adherents a desire to maintain the integrity of their life by guarding the portals of their bodies and by rectifying states of imbalance, and by leading them to think of the temple system similarly, the bodily-impurity system drives them to sacrifice. Moreover, they are encouraged to see their sacrifice not only as the means of rectifying their unbalanced state, but also as a way of security the integrity of the holy itself.[210]

Earlier we noted that both the P system and the H system may have been designed, broadly, to do the same thing. Kugler clarifies that "the bodily-impurity and temple-holiness systems of Leviticus 1-16 can be seen to have been constructed by priests to shape and preserve Israelite society according to their vision, and to encourage the laity to sacrifice."[211] At the same time,

> When we apply Douglas's insights to the bodily-impurity and temple-holiness systems of Leviticus 17-26 a far different picture emerges .... [w]hile the bodily-impurity system of Leviticus 1-16 defines impurity as something improper entering into or exiting from a human body situated in a non-holy, common society, in chs. 17-26 impurity occurs by the inappropriate use of the human body in the midst of a pervasively-holy human community .... [w]e are forced to conclude from the evidence in Leviticus 17-26

---

[210] Kugler, p. 23.
[211] Kugler, p. 24.

that its authors envisioned a society in which holiness would be expanded and democratized with all its attendant consequences, namely higher standards of conduct and personal responsibility for lay people and reduced rewards of service for priests who were then no longer the sole, well-rewarded guarantors of the community's holiness.[212]

Toward what end would the H authors have constructed this system? Kugler believes that

A premium is placed on just human behavior, and priestly sacrifices as a means of adjusting the humane-divine balance is marginalized so that power over one's life in relationship to the divine and the rest of the community can rest squarely in the hands of the individual. It is, in fact, the sort of idealized socio-religious structure one might expect from an observer who felt the worldview proposed in Leviticus 1-16 neglected issues of social justice, enriched priests, and impoverished laity. It is, perhaps, a structure that was constructed in some part to marginalize priests, or at least place a check on their power; but it is certainly a structure that was created in large part to give laity control of their own destiny.[213]

Response

One of the reasons I find the argument that systems of holiness were set up in order to provide a means to structure society and order individual lives within it so compelling is that it provides a meaningful interpretation for just about any of the theories presented thus far. Whether from an emic or an etic standpoint, we can see how different biblical writers (and scholars) would present varying depictions of a holiness system based on their distinctive world-views. When we note differences between P and H, between P and D, between striving and conferring, between prophet and priest and

---

[212] Kugler, pp. 24-5.
[213] Kugler, pp. 25-6.

sage, each of these may reasonable be assigned to a different sense of creating what is best for society. Still, to accept this reading we must address a few concerns.

First, in describing this scheme, Regev explains that neither Deuteronomy nor the Priestly Schools are defining what is holy and what is profane; rather, each is trying to determine what holiness is and society can maintain it. On the surface it may appear that these are not Deuteronomy's questions, or even necessarily those of the Priestly Schools. However, taking a step back, Regev is arguing that the goal of both sets of texts is to help people understand how they can achieve holiness. In the Priestly writings, the answer, as we have seen, is primarily through either cultic means or moral behavior. In Deuteronomy, it is through following God's commandments as a Chosen People. Either way, the bottom line is, how do we connect our lives and our communities to holiness.

When we approach the details, although Kugler and Douglas both talk about the holiness system as a response to threats to society, they seem to differ in their specific assessment of that threat. According to Kugler, the holiness system was designed in a way that reflects its architects' greater concern for loss from within than external danger. Douglas, on the other hand, sees more of an external threat and a holiness system designed to produce a cohesive center that can withstand outside pressure as a minority. While I am wary of contesting Douglas's seminal work, and whereas their work is not mutually exclusive, I believe that she leans more heavily on an anthropological analysis of the culture, while Kugler takes his opinion more directly from the text. Kugler's exegetical method leads him to conclude that the symbolic threat of skin disease is less severe than that of impure emissions. Although both what attacks our bodies and what we emit from our bodies raises concern, the mortal threat – and the threat requiring more

serious action in order to reclaim purity – is that of loss from the inside. If we accept

Douglas' proposition that the body-purity system represents the overall society, then

Kugler's analysis seems robust.

On the other hand, Kugler also points out that the system moves society in the

direction of individual responsibility in the holiness enterprise. However, we previously

noted that Schwartz made the important point that holiness is more of a communal

concern than an individual one. And Grammie defined prophetic holiness as resting upon

social and communal justice, while the wisdom literature presented it as stemming from

individual morality. I would argue that both options can be supported, again noting that

the social utility nature of a holiness system demands to be utilized by its author in a

manner that they find most appropriate. For some this would entail a very personal

dimension, while for others it would mean a communal response.

If this newer crop of scholars is right that holiness is a means to an end, it would

go a long way toward explaining the vast differences in the nature of holiness that we

have found and analyzed within *Tanakh*. If holiness is an attribute of God or an

emanation to be received or achieved, one might think that the *Tanakh* would provide an

extended search for understanding it. If, on the other hand, holiness is a much less

tangible reality and it is instead a process or means, then we should expect to find a

multitude of approaches for how to reach this end.

These insights into the holiness system developed in the *Tanakh* lead well into a

final discussion of what, exactly, it is that holiness means to us. Taking all of our

previous analysis together, I will attempt to answer the question: when Leviticus 19

demands that we "be holy," what is it that we are commanded to do?

Chapter 7:
Is God always holy?
(Hosea 11:8-9)

Contrary to many interpretations of holiness, there are moments within *Tanakh*

when it is both God and Israel who have the power to create holiness. Moreover, it may

even be said that in certain situations, holiness would not exist without the interaction of

God and Israel. Without question, there are multiple readings of holiness with our Bible.

Still, is it possible that the *Tanakh* itself might inform us that even while God is a source

of holiness for Israel, that Israel might also be necessary in order for God to be holy? The

idea that God is not simply and always holy goes against nearly every commonly-held

understanding of the *Tanakh*, and yet, I believe the Book of Hosea may provide us with a

fascinating insight into one ancient understanding of God's nature. In order to uncover

this subtle clue, however, it will be necessary to present a full exegetical interpretation on

Hosea 11:8-9.

Genre

The 11th chapter of Hosea presents a unique challenge to interpretation, as it

imprecisely mimics a number of different biblical styles. If we are to extract meaning

from this passage, it is important for us to begin with an understanding of how Hosea 11

is both like and unlike other biblical passages.

To begin with, H.H. Wolff claims that "The entire passage is a *historico-theological accusation*, as the summary statement in v 7a indicates."[214] He compares this passage to Amos 4:6ff, wherein God withholds rain since the people would not return to God, and to Isaiah 9:7ff, wherein God allows Israel to be destroyed due to its haughtiness. Each is an Announcement of Judgment. Although Hosea 11 follows a similar pattern, vv. 8-9 demonstrate a turn, a reconsideration which would seem to remove this passage from the category of threat.

Nonetheless, Wolff continues that "it is structured in analogy to a legal complaint made by a father against his stubborn son. Verses 5-6 are not introduced as an announcement of judgment; rather, they belong to the description of the consequences of Israel's reactions and Yahweh's new actions."[215] A number of scholars pick up on the idea that Hosea 11 follows the form of legal proceedings. Some have "sought to defend the unity of the chapter by interpreting it as having the form of legal proceedings against a rebellious son. The disobedience is recounted (v. 1-4) and the punishment proposed (v. 6-7). But the father can't bring himself to carry out the punishment (v. 8-9)."[216] This theory is supported by a linguistic analysis, as Israel is addressed first indirectly, then directly. This inconsistency "is to be explained on form critical grounds, for the speech is structured according to legal procedure. When the transition is made from the accusation to the 'proposal to reach a settlement' the addressee naturally changes; the accusation is addressed to the court, but the proposal to reach a settlement is addressed directly to the defendant."[217]

---

[214] Wolff, p. 193.
[215] Wolff, p. 194.
[216] Daniels, p. 65.
[217] Emmerson, p. 41.

Ancient readers easily would have understood both the relationship and the setting of this drama. H.D. Beeby notes:

> God the father and Israel the son are not metaphors which are exclusive to Hosea. They are found in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and more significantly in Exod. 4:22: "And you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the Lord, Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you, Let my son go that he may serve me.'" But perhaps the most notable in relation to understanding the chapter are the regulations regarding rebellious sons in Deut. 21:18-21. On the accusation of a son by his parents, the city elders shall stone him to death with stones; "so you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel shall hear, and fear."[218]

By the end of v. 7, those familiar with our basic laws and customs would have known what was coming: "Strictly speaking there should be no real story here, only the report of a common court case and the inevitable execution."[219] However, "YHWH transcends the human legal institutions which enforce the death penalty for recalcitrant sons because *He is God, not a human being*. He will instead restore his 'children' who in the renewed covenant will 'go after YHWH."[220] The legal verdict of vv. 5-7 "is being questioned and transcended."[221]

These legal proceedings, however, leave us with a few questions. First, if this was a legal verdict, how can it be overturned? Even though it is God doing the turning, it is not enough to leave it at that. God still needs a reason and a method. Further, what does it mean for God to fail to carry out such a verdict? Does this place God into the realm of holy, by sparing a life? Does this place God into the realm of unholy, for transgressing the law? If Hosea 11 does follow the form of an Announcement of Judgment by way of legal proceedings, we still have some work to do.

---

[218] Beeby, p. 142.
[219] Beeby, p. 142.
[220] Yee, p. 227.
[221] Beeby, p. 146.

In a different vein, it would be easy to label this an Announcement of Salvation, especially because the prophet's name, in Hebrew *Hoshea*, means salvation.[222] Indeed, Gale Yee argues that this passage is similar to others within the book of Hosea, in that it "moves from threat, to punishment, which, for R2 [redactor], is a chastisement to evoke the people's repentance, and then on to salvation."[223] Grace Emmerson points out that "these salvation sayings show the same emphasis as that which characterized 2:16-17 .... Here supremely is the prophet's statement of Yahweh's sovereign freedom as the transcendent Holy One, holiness which, significantly, is made evident not in judgment but in salvation."[224]

Jeremiah 31 provides an excellent example of this sort of salvation narrative, which even uses some of the same terminology as Hosea 11. God refers to Israel as Ephraim, and as a son (31:20). God speaks of returning Israel from captivity (30:10), all because God's heart and guts never stopped yearning for him (31:20).

Unfortunately, salvation also does not quite capture what is happening in Hosea 11. First, salvation narratives typically expound on type of relationship between God and Israel that either God or the prophets envision; however, they do not go so far as to provide reasons why the relationship should be this way. They may speak of love or merit (in the sense that Israel follows the commandments and thus deserves salvation), but they never actually explain why God withholds judgment, why God does not follow through with the ubiquitous threat to Israel's existence.

Further, I would posit that there is a difference between saving Israel and failing to destroy Israel; in this sense, salvation narrative would be a misnomer for this genre.

---

[222] Davies, p. 23.
[223] Yee, p. 214.
[224] Emmerson, p. 43.

There are two types of "saving" which God does. First, there are occasions when God positively effects salvation – such as rescuing Israel from Egypt. There are other occasions, however, when God could or should destroy Israel for her insolence, her apostasy, etc – such as the incident with the golden calf or turning to Canaanite gods once the Children of Israel entered the Land. There is a qualitative difference, though, between saving Israel from her enemies vs. saving Israel from potential destruction at God's own hands. The latter is more pardon than salvation, more like magnanimity in the face of disappointment. And it requires a different explanation. It works to talk of love as a reason for saving a child or partner from an enemy. It is quite different, though, to renege on a promise, to forego punishment that one (God) has clearly established. This case of pardon requires a different explanation than the many other cases of salvation.

Helen Schungel-Straumann offers an interesting twist in her feminist interpretation of Hosea 11. She creatively describes the idea that "in its form and genre, Hosea 11 is a historical-theological lament, couched entirely in the 'I' form."[225] Although her analysis leads her in the direction of determining that God is acting as mother instead of father in this passage, and therefore away from an explication of vv 8-9 that we are interested in, I think her genre determination can be helpful. This passage does not quite fit into either the Announcement of Judgment or the Announcement of Salvation category. A "lament," on the other hand, implies a certain internal struggle, a sense that within the text there exists an unexpected twist, perhaps even regret.

---

[225] Schungel-Straumann, p. 197. Unfortunately, she does not offer examples of other passages that would fit into this genre. To date I have not been able to come up with any, though I am confident that further research could reveal a number of passages that would fit with her model.

Historical Setting

It is clear that Hosea 11 evokes a number of very different interpretations from scholars; however, genre alone will not provide us with enough information about this text to analyze it. Just as important is the fact that Hosea does not conform to our standard prophetic models of interpretation. Hosea lived at a time of great change in the long-term fortunes of Israel. Prior to his arrival, the thriving Kingdom of Israel in the north was a major player in the international arena of the 9th century (see, for example, the mention of Omri in the Mesha Inscription). [226] Along with the Kingdom of Judea in the south, however, it became a relatively easy target for the on-going struggle between dominant eastern and western powers, such as Egypt, Babylonia, and Assyria. In the years leading up to Hosea's likely time of activity, Jeroboam II (c. 787 – 747) reigned over a time of great national expansion. It was a high point in Israel's history, when she benefited from the regional power of Assyria. However, soon after Jeroboam's death, "two kings had been murdered and a period of internal division and uncertainty had been ushered in. It was to last until the fall of Samaria in 722."[227] Most analysts agree that the Book of Hosea emerged in between Jeroboam II's death in 746 BCE and the fall of the Northern Kingdom to Assyria in 722-721 BCE, and that it "accurately reflects the social and political turmoil that attended the last days of Israel."[228] More specifically, it is likely that "chap. 11 belongs to the time of Shalmaneser V's reign (727-2), when Israel's new turn toward Egypt provoked Assyria's retaliation (2 Kgs 17:4) .... the most likely period would be the first half of the reign of Shalmaneser V, perhaps at the beginning of

---

[226] Although historically disputed, the biblical portrait of a united monarchy under David and Solomon also predates Hosea by approximately three centuries.

[227] Davies, pp. 25-26.

[228] Fontaine, p. 45.

his punitive measures, especially since Samaria itself is not yet expressly mentioned as a besieged or even a conquered city (v 6)."[229] Verse 6 is key in determining when this writing happened, as "The sword of the Assyrian armies had already done its bitter work during the campaign of 733 (II Kings 15.29). If Hoshea had by the time of this oracle already withheld tribute and sent to Egypt for assistance (II Kings 17.4), then the retribution of Shalmaneser was imminent."[230]

Leading up to the days of Hosea's prophesy, Israel had become a place full of intrigue, as its kings attempted to choose the right side in the battles over ancient turf. Even though Hosea may have predicted the looming disaster, he "probably did not witness the destruction of the capital Samaria and the deportation of the population in 722-721 BCE. The words in ch. 11 are from the prophet's later period and can be regarded as the quintessence of a painful and mature prophetic life."[231] For Hosea, the actual disaster may not have been most important; rather, in true prophetical form, "Hosea's emphasis on Israel's past history is more than a mere rehearsal: Israel's present and future realities can be intuited from an understanding of nation's past relationship to God."[232] And while Hosea is certainly taking into account the political realities of his day, "the juxtaposition of Egypt and Assyria ... takes us beyond the purely historical and leads us into the wider domains of symbol and theology."[233] Although this text has definite historical background, which provided Hosea with grist for his prophetical mill, it still must be understood as a theological statement – and one that offers a rare and shocking glimpse into an ancient understanding of God.

---

[229] Wolff, p. 197.
[230] Mays, p. 155.
[231] Schungel-Straumann, p. 197.
[232] Fontaine, pp. 48-49.
[233] Beeby, pp. 144-5.

Hosea 11 also leaves itself open to interpretation regarding who, exactly, was involved in writing this text. To begin with, "given the strong theological affinities found between Hosea's thinking and that expressed in the book of Deuteronomy, it is not unlikely that both were influenced by the traditions kept alive among the circles of the Levites, Israel's teaching priesthood, and that the survival of both works is owed at least in part to Levites who fled to Judah after 722-21."[234] Wolff speculates that it is most conceivable that,

> As in 9:10-10:8, this divine speech was delivered before the circle of those who belonged to the opposition group composed of prophets and Levites. They were intensely interested in Israel's previous history and in the question of the nation's future. The abbreviated, sketchy nature of the passage, especially recognizable in the transition from v 7 to v 8 and from v 9 to v 11, would suggest that the account was written by this circle. These traditionists were most likely responsible for the additions made in v 10.[235]

Further, comparing chapters two and 11, he suggests that the "routes taken by the transmission of these two related chapters were certainly different ones. In chap. 2 a redactor supplemented a written document from Hosea's early period with some of his later sayings. In chap. 11 the prophet's audition account has been recorded by his disciples."[236]

The question of authorship and transmission is not a minor one. As we compare the message in this text to other prophetic works, we must remember that Hosea was the only prophet native to the Northern Kingdom (although Amos appeared there, he came from Judah first). As a result, Hosea's entire way of thinking and his theology are unique to the prophetic commentary, and "different in many ways from that of the better-known

---

[234] Fontaine, p. 49.
[235] Wolff, p. 196.
[236] Wolff, p. 196.

southern kingdom .... Therefore images that at first seem alienating should not be too facilely compared to ideas stemming from Judah and Jerusalem."[237]

Hosea's theology rose directly out of a combination of two historical forces: the struggle with Canaanite cults and the impending Assyrian domination. To begin with, "Hosea's world of thought is that of Canaanite myth and cultus which had exerted its influence upon Israel .... Hosea freely forms and develops his concepts as he struggles against Canaanite religion."[238] Even before the threat of Assyria,

> Israel's exclusive worship of Yahweh had been threatened by the demands of political expediency .... marriage alliances with the Phoenician city of Tyre in the ninth century bought official toleration of Baal worship to Israel in the person of Queen Jezebel .... [t]he rivalry between Yahwism and Baalism was based on far more than Israelite sensibilities about the inappropriateness of sexuality as a legitimate form of worship ... [including] social and political differences between Israel and surrounding neighbors.[239]

Adding to the problems,

> Israel and Judah each had their own covenant traditions, and prophets tended to articulate their messages form the perspective of the covenant that had been most important in their national history. In Judah the covenant with David and his house was viewed as "unconditional" ... in the North, the Mosaic or "conditional" covenant model prevailed: the people swore to fulfill certain obligations in gratitude for Yahweh's delivering acts in the exodus. If the people did not, God could withdraw from the covenant. (see Ex 19-20)[240]

Given his Yahwistic explanation of real-world events, "Hosea, of course, envisions Israel's coming destruction as the result of the country's apostasy from

---

[237] Schungel-Straumann, pp. 197-98.
[238] Wolff, p. 198.
[239] Fontaine, pp. 45-46.
[240] Fontaine, p. 48.

Yahweh, the delivering God of Moses and the ancestors."[241] In verse 6, for example,

"the prophet speaks of his own present, in which the Assyrian king Shalmaneser V was

plundering the cities of Samaria. Hosea sees a theological connection between the refusal

to turn back and the political situation, that is, the collapse that has occurred in his own

time."[242] In the big picture,

> Hosea upheld a theology which saw Yahweh as Israel's god
> "from the land of Egypt" (12:9; 13:4). Long ago he had found
> Israel, brought her out of Egypt, cared for her and given her the
> land with its fruits (9:10; 11:1-4; 12:13; 13:4-5, 2:8). She stood in
> a covenant relationship with him (6:7; 8:1), like a wife with her
> husband (2:7), and this should have involved observance of his
> law (4:6; 8:2, 12). Where did Hosea find such a theology? In his
> commentary H. W. Wolff presented a view that Hosea derived it
> from the same prophetic and Levitical circles who, some
> generations later, produced the Book of Deuteronomy.[243]

With all this historical background, most commentators seize on the natural

explanation of Hosea's prophesies:

> To the confident but increasingly pagan nation of Jeroboam's
> time he spoke of religious corruption and imminent disaster ....
> [a]t this stage exile seems not yet to be in view, and natural
> catastrophes are the expected form of Yahweh's judgment .... [a]t
> this time (734-32) of acute distress Hosea seems to have wanted
> above all to convince his hearers that the troubles through which
> they were passing were the result of Yahweh's judgment and
> therefore could not be resolved by diplomatic negotiations or acts
> of religious devotion .... [I]ncreasingly Hosea's message of
> judgment found its grounding in Israel's failure to respond to
> Yahweh's loving call to repentance. In one late passage,
> probably from this period, we see the prophet breaking through to
> the insight that Yahweh's love for his people is so great that,
> even in the face of her obstinacy, he cannot and will not give her
> up utterly (11:1-9).[244]

---

[241] Fontaine, p. 42.
[242] Schungel-Straumann, p. 205.
[243] Davies, p. 31.
[244] Davies, pp. 28-29.

However, as we will see, this explanation does not adequately explain the surprising twist in Hosea vv. 8-9.

Translation

Although there are several representative translations of these Hosea verses, based on the prior analysis of Hosea 11's genre and setting, I offer a new reading of vv. 8-9 as follows:

11:8 – How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I give you up like Admah, treat you like Zeboim? My heart has turned on me[245], my comfort and compassion[246] have grown warm and tender together.

11:9 – I will not act on my fierce anger,[247] I can not change[248] in order to destroy Ephraim. For I am God, and not man. In your presence I am Holy[249], unable[250] to come (to you) enraged.

ח אֵיךְ אֶתֶּנְךָ אֶפְרַיִם אֲמַגֶּנְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֵיךְ אֶתֶּנְךָ
כְאַדְמָה אֲשִׂימְךָ כִּצְבֹאיִם נֶהְפַּךְ עָלַי לִבִּי יַחַד נִכְמְרוּ נִחוּמָי׃

ט לֹא אֶעֱשֶׂה חֲרוֹן אַפִּי לֹא אָשׁוּב לְשַׁחֵת אֶפְרָיִם
כִּי אֵל אָנֹכִי וְלֹא־אִישׁ בְּקִרְבְּךָ קָדוֹשׁ וְלֹא אָבוֹא בְּעִיר׃

---

[245] Although an idiom such as "I have had a change of heart" may be appropriate, I find a more precise translation to be more powerful as it conveys a sense that God does not have control of this change.

[246] Although there is only one word in the Hebrew, it is plural, as is the accompanying verb. As such, I find it appropriate to offer two sides of God's *nachum*.

[247] The combination of *Charon* and *Api* exaggerates the anger.

[248] Many commentators offer "again" here, but as per Schungel-Straumann, God has not yet destroyed Israel! The remainder almost all offer "return" as a literal translation. But I am convinced by Schungel-Straumann, who argues that *Ashuv* refers to the previous verse, where God announced the intention not to give up on Israel. And so God's "return" in this case would be to change God's mind about that decision. Further, "can not" will lead nicely into the next statement (which is developed in this paper) that God is fundamentally different in Israel's presence – a difference that even God may not be able to control.

[249] This phrase contains the meaning of the entire verse, and will be fully explicated in what follows.

[250] This is a slight departure from the text, which seems to only say that God will not come while enraged. However, given the immediately preceding statement, that God is holy in the presence of Israel, I would argue that the latter statement implies that God must be holy in that situation, and is unable to be otherwise.

Jewish Publication Society (1985) Hosea 11:8-9 [8] How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah, Render you like Zeboiim? I have had a change of heart, All My tenderness is stirred. [9] I will not act on My wrath, Will not turn to destroy Ephraim. For I am God, not man, The Holy One in your midst: I will not come in fury.

New Jerusalem Bible Hosea 11:8-9 [8] Ephraim, how could I part with you? Israel, how could I give you up? How could I make you like Admah or treat you like Zeboiim? My heart within me is overwhelmed, fever grips my inmost being. [9] I will not give rein to my fierce anger, I will not destroy Ephraim again, for I am God, not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I shall not come to you in anger.

New Revised Standard Version (1989) Hosea 11:8-9 [8]How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender. [9]I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath. I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath.

Structure

I. The Old Way

    A. God presents the God-Israel relationship as it has been in the past

        1. God is like a parent who loves a child (11:1)

        2. The child turns his back (11:2)

        3. Again, the child ignores God's love (11:3-4)

    B. The Ramifications – God describes what will happen if the relationship continues as it has been (11:5-7)

II. New Understanding

    A. Change of heart – God realizes that God is unable to act according to the old paradigm (11:8)

    B. The explanation – God provides a new definition of God-self in relation to Israel, which explains why God cannot act as we would expect based on the preceding passages (11:9)

Structure Description

The structure of these verses in Hosea 11 offers fascinating insight into the underlying message of the passage. Verses 1-7 are all designed as an introduction for verses 8-9, which reveal a startling new understanding of God – both for us and, perhaps, for God. Without the build-up of the previous verses, though, the message embedded within verse 9 would not emerge so easily. God describes the God-Israel relationship in the past and, potentially, in the future. In the midst of doing so, we witness God's realization that the expected future is not possible, after all, due to a surprising revelation about the nature of God's relationship with Israel. To this end, certain words stand out – using the names Israel and Ephraim over and over lend the passage intimacy (11:1, 3, 8, 9). In using קָרָא three times (11:1, 2, 7), this passage calls out to be heard and interpreted. And perhaps most dramatically, the passage repeats the word יַחַד (11:7, 8), indicating that God's nature is inherently bound up together with Israel.

Analysis

After analyzing the genre and setting, it is abundantly clear that vv 8-9 provide us with the key to understanding Hosea 11. Up to that point, we have, on its surface, a fairly standard situation: Israel, as rebellious son, has acted against God, the loving parent. Our text both presents the case against Israel and provides the expected punishment. However, in the end God changes God's mind and will not mete out the deserved consequences. Most commentators have taken this as sufficient justification to label this entire chapter a Salvation Narrative; after all, God saved a people who deserved severe

punishment. However, the crucial question remains: why did God change God's mind? This is where we veer into lament, and where we uncover the true meaning of this text.

Long ago, Ibn Ezra hinted at a more nuanced understanding of Hosea 11. Unfortunately, he did not expound on it; subsequently, it seems to have been ignored. He interprets verse 9b as, "Moreover, it was in your midst alone that I have been hallowed."[251] Abe Lipshitz, interpolating from Ibn Ezra's text, notes that:

> According to I.E.'s interpretation the sympathy for Ephraim
> expressed in v. 8 continues with v. 9, by adding the thought that
> God will not execute the fierceness of His anger against the
> people, for, not being human, He is able to restrain those
> emotions that are considered passionate in men. Furthermore,
> God's presence is closely related to the people of Israel (with
> emphasis on the term *B 'kirb 'cha* = within you), and needs no
> geographical dwelling place. It is thus unlikely that He would
> destroy the very people in whom God's holiness inheres.[252]

Ibn Ezra clearly sees a direct and complex relationship between "holy" and Israel, but it appears that this element of his work did not catch on. Beeby is not alone in understanding the importance of these verses when he states that "to the dialogue with the Deuteronomic law is now added a far more significant dialogue – the dialogue of God with himself in which law and grace, goodness and severity do battle. Other places in the OT speak of God repenting, and elsewhere he is recorded as changing his mind, but nowhere else is there such an awesome unveiling of his own inner conversation."[253] However, it seems that scholars like Beeby overlook the fact that Hosea was the only northern writing prophet, and that this feature may account for a different theology in the text. As stated previously, this may be an important reason why Hosea's prophesy is not only startling in comparison to everything else we know, but unique. We cannot

---

[251] Lipshitz, p. 126.
[252] Lipshitz, p. 126.
[253] Beeby, p. 145.

adequately compare Hosea's work to that of any other prophet. Even if Hosea appears to match another prophet in genre, his northern background, theological position, etc, imbue his work with a perspective that might be entirely different. Even though his work was probably edited in Judah after the north's fall, we may assume that the core ideas in his work remained true, and therefore different from any other prophet.

Schungel-Straumann understands that given all we know about Hosea's milieu, "God talk [is] difficult .... [t]he question at issue was not theoretical monotheism ... but rather the question of *what kind* of God this YHWH is, and *how* he relates to Israel."[254] Hosea was not defining a relationship as much as he was defining God! As we search for greater understanding about that nature of the biblical God, the central question for understanding Hosea 11:8-9 is, why did God change God's mind and fail to execute the appropriate punishment against Israel? The predominant answer among modern commentators is simple: it was due to God's love for Israel.

Love

Wolff sums up the scholarly position when he notes that "the prophet is much less a witness and plaintiff against Israel's history than he is a witness to the divine love which struggles with Israel as within itself."[255] James Mays, too, finds love at the core of the revelation in Hosea 11:

> Yahweh's self-disclosure through the speech of Hosea reaches an
> unusual level of intensity and power in this chapter .... [t]he
> portrayal of Yahweh as a father caring for a son achieves an
> explicit tenderness and detail unmatched in the Old Testament.
> Yet that portrayal is followed by a soliloquy of God which comes
> to a climax in the surprising disavowal, 'I am God, not man' ....

---

[254] Schungel-Straumann, pp. 194-5.
[255] Wolff, p. 203.

the emotion and commitment of love is introduced as the basis
and power of Yahweh's way with Israel.[256]

Wolff argues further that the centrality of love is different from other passages

similar to Hosea 11: "Unlike the historico-theological accusations which precede and

follow chap 11, the accusations here do not issue into a new threat .... of great

theological significance in this chapter is its disclosure that Israel's election and guidance

is founded upon God's love (vv 1,4); this love is not some inconstant characteristic but

proves to be the incomparable holy essence of God himself."[257] According to Schungel-

Straumann, "Hosea may be the first person, historically speaking, who applied this word

expressly to YHWH's love for his people. Before Hosea, it could not be said that

YHWH *loved* Israel."[258] Mays concurs: "So far as one can tell from the Old Testament

Hosea is the first to base Yahweh's relation to Israel on his love."[259]

Yet all of these scholars go beyond the text with the idea that love is involved in

the God-Israel relationship, and insist that it is the basis and most important aspect of that

relationship. However, vv. 8-9 hold the key to understanding why God does not act in

this particular instance – and nowhere in verses 8 or 9 do we find the word love!

Love is certainly a tempting conclusion to draw from Hosea 11:8-9. However, it

seems to me that much of this scholarship has been influenced by Christian ideas which

have developed over time into an article of faith. Almost every commentator I read

viewed this passage as laying the groundwork for the eventual message of the New

Testament; namely, that God's love is the *raison d'etre* and supreme expression of our

relationship with God. And while God's love is certainly an appropriate and powerful

---

[256] Mays, p. 151.
[257] Wolff, p. 203.
[258] Schungel-Straumann, p. 199.
[259] Mays, p. 153.

biblical and Jewish concept, I don't believe it is the fundamental building block of our faith. More to the point, it may not be central here. Instead, we find here a strong statement that, at least for Hosea, holiness is a key to understanding God and our relationship with God. As we continue to delve deeply into the text of Hosea 11, I believe it will become abundantly clear that according to Hosea, God is not only involved in a loving relationship with Israel, but God is defined by Israel and, shockingly, God's holiness is apparent only when in the presence of God's people, Israel.

Admah/Zeboiim

There are several elements in Hosea which hint at holiness, rather than love, as a key to understanding these verses[260]. Perhaps the most convincing is the use of Admah and Zeboim in verse 8: "How can I give you up like Admah, treat you like Zeboim?" Although this is a thinly-veiled reference to God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,[261] there is an important distinction between the two stories. While these cities might work well as a metaphor for Israel, the fact is that they were alien towns.

---

[260] (1) Verse 8 presents us with a series of exclamatory "how" statements. Similar to what we find in the story of Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:9) and in Psalm 137:4, the exclamatory "how" refers to a situation where one is simply unable to act in a certain manner given the circumstances. Here, then, we can take v. 8 to be God claiming that God simply cannot act against his "son" Ephraim given their relationship. As opposed to a standard reading, that God chooses not to act based on God's love for Israel, the exclamatory "how" indicates that it is not so much that God does not want to act, but that God cannot act! (2) Beeby (p. 146) notes that "four times in Hos. 11:8 God says 'you' to his son as he bares his soul for mankind to see his tenderness and vulnerability ... then in v. 9, as though to balance and complete the four 'you's,' God thunders four negatives. He will *not* execute his fierce anger; he will *not* again destroy Ephraim; he is *not* human but God; and then finally, to underline and summarize, God repeats that he will *not* destroy." It is not by accident that a construct of the word "you" appears four times in verse 8. This verse marks the crucial turning point in chapter 11, the surprise change in Israel's fortunes and in God's judgment. "You" provides a not-so-subtle explanation of the reason behind this twist: it is you, meaning Israel, that creates this change. It is you/Israel that is responsible for God's turnabout. And, as we shall see later, it is you/Israel that is responsible for the holiness that forces God to make this change!
[261] According to Yee (p. 225) "the reference to the destruction of Admah and Zeboiim recalls Dt 29:22 ... In Moses' final words to the people, he warns them that if they forsake the covenant to worship other gods (Dtr 29:24-25), YHWH will make the land like Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, 'which YHWH overthrew in his anger' (Dt 29:22b)."

Questions of a xenophobic God aside, we find no mention of "holy" in any rendition of the Sodom story. The cities of the plain were not simply destroyed due to their wickedness, their destruction was set up by the absence of God's holiness. And if such holiness was conspicuously absent in Sodom, it makes that same holiness much more apparent in Hosea. How can we explain one situation where a not-specifically-holy God destroys and another situation where a specifically-holy God does not destroy?

Beeby rightly notes that "God is declaring his utter inability to treat the firstborn son as he had these cities of the plain,"[262] but he fails to ask the crucial follow-up question: why? Why was there no holiness when God destroyed the cities of the plain?

In your midst

Mays represents a common interpretation when he demonstrates that "the designation of Yahweh as 'the one in the midst of Israel' is a way of speaking of the election"[263] and compares it to similar verses in Numbers 14:14, Joshua 3:10, and Isaiah 12:6. This phrase becomes central to the question of God's inaction in Hosea 11, and so we need to be very careful with our comparisons. Neither Numbers 14 nor Joshua 3 mention anything about holiness in relation to God. Those passages merely mention the fact that God is in the presence of the people after leaving Egypt, and as they prepare to enter the promised land. There is a fundamental difference between saying that God is in the midst of Israel and saying that God is holy in the midst of Israel. As such, these verses do not help us understand the specific nature of God's presence in Hosea.

---

[262] Beeby, p. 146.
[263] Mays, p. 158.

Isaiah, not surprisingly, does speak of holiness. In that sense it is a better, though still not perfect, comparison. "Holy" does not stand alone in verse 12:6; rather, it is part of a larger phrase – *K'dosh Yisrael*, meaning something like "Holy One of Israel." It is a different phrase than simply to say "holy" as it does in Hosea 11.

Hosea 11 presents some aspect of God in the presence of Israel. As we move to the question of what holiness is, in this context, it is important to note that whatever its meaning, it is inherently tied to God being in the presence of Israel. The masoretic text indicates that *B'kir'b'cha Qadosh* is a single phrase, and most translations correctly note that this phrase stands alone.

Holiness

I have argued that love is not the reason for God's shift away from punishment in Hosea 11. Instead, the presentation of God's holiness in the presence of Israel belies the fact that God wants to punish Israel and is only prevented from doing so by God's very nature amidst Israel. God simply cannot swoop down and devastate Israel in Hosea's formulation. Once God arrives in Israel's presence, God's very nature is changed – to holy – and God is unable to follow through with that vengeful act!

Mays understands that "the resolution of Yahweh is grounded on his utter difference from man .... He is wrathful and loving *like* man, but *as* God."[264]

If the reason for God's change of heart is God's distinction from humanity, we can then attempt to determine exactly what the difference is between humanity and God. Scholars such as Mays, G.I. Davies, and Francis Landy note that there are four other spots in the Hebrew Bible where this sort of stark contrast appears between humanity and

---

[264] Mays, p. 157.

God, and that the difference is God's absolute freedom, God's ability to rise above vengeance, or God's unchanging nature.[265] In Hosea, however, the text makes it exceedingly clear that the attribute which distinguishes God from humanity is God's holiness.

Unfortunately, commentators across the board misuse or misapply the term "holy," which leads to confused analysis. Mays, for example, attempts to tell us that, "'Holy' is a synonym for God; it indicates the numinous and dynamic, the *mysterium tremendum*, the incomparable awesome force of the divine. 'The Holy One in your midst', then, is really an alternate title for 'Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt' (12.9; 13.4)."[266] Emmerson translates the word *qadosh* in v. 9 as "the Holy One"[267] and Davies follows suit, saying that "*qados* is practically synonymous to 'God'."[268]

As noted earlier in this paper, defining *qadosh* as a synonym for God is common. However, it is important to note that the word *qadosh* appears 28 times in the Prophets. Most often, *qadosh* is paired with *Yisrael* to make a title for God (essentially, the "Holy One of Israel"). As a phrase, the word *qadosh* does not, in these cases, appear alone – only with *Yisrael*. As such, these other instances are a completely different construction,

---

[265] Mays (pp. 157-8) notes that "a stark contrast between God and man appears in three other texts of the OT (Isa. 31.3; Ezek. 28.2; Num. 23.19); in each case the contrast is used to show that the limitations which qualify man do not affect the sovereign freedom and power of Yahweh." Davies, G.I. *New Century Bible Commentary: Hosea*. Marshall Pickering, 1992, pp. 263-4, says "This may be understood to mean that Yahweh as 'God' rises above human responses of anger and vengeance, and shows mercy instead. This is certainly the sense of the similar statement in Isa. 55:6-9, and the idea that mercy is fundamental to Yahweh's being ('name') is strongly expressed in Ex. 24:6-7 and related passages." Francis Landy, *Hosea*. Sheffield, 1997, p. 143, says "the argument that God is not human is found also in Samuel's speech to Saul in 1 Sam 15.29. There, however, it is adduced as evidence for God's intractability, his immunity to changes of mind or pity. The remorse or regrets stirred up in v. 8 are specifically denied him. As we found in discussing 6.6, Hosea is a latter-day Samuel who reverses his message."
[266] Mays, p. 158.
[267] Emmerson, p. 42.
[268] Davies, p. 264. He continues, "particularly in association with the phrase 'in your midst' the emphasis would be on the relationship between Yahweh and his people."

and cannot be equated uncritically with the word *qadosh* alone. *Qadosh* appears alone, however, only six times:

- It can be used to modify another word, as in 1Samuel 2:2[269] or 2Kings 4:9.[270]

- It can be used as an adverb to describe those remaining in Zion in Isaiah 4:3.[271]

- It can be used as an adjective describing God in Isaiah 6:3[272] or Ezekiel 39:7.[273]

Only one time in the entire prophetical writings does it appear to be a noun meaning something akin to, "the Holy One" (Isaiah 40:25[274]). It is extremely rare, and decidedly out of character, for the prophets to use the word *qadosh* to refer to God rather than to speak about God. The word *qadosh* is understood by the prophets to be a descriptive term. As such, our passage in Hosea 11 should not be read as "the Holy One in your midst." Instead, if we take *qadosh* as a descriptive word, Hosea 11:9 would need to rendered more in the sense of, "holy in your midst."

Landy begins to move in the right direction when he notes that the powerful statement of God's difference in v. 7 is "immediately controverted by the following phrase: 'in your midst holy'. God's transcendence – the otherness signified by 'holy' – is his immanence. If God is in our midst, he cannot come back to destroy us, at least not without destroying himself."[275]

As we better understand the term *qadosh*, our understanding of Hosea 11:8-9 is completely transformed. God is not merely announcing a change of direction and

---

[269] אֵין־קָדוֹשׁ כַּיהוָה כִּי אֵין בִּלְתֶּךָ וְאֵין צוּר כֵּאלֹהֵינוּ

[270] וַתֹּאמֶר אֶל־אִישָׁהּ הִנֵּה־נָא יָדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹהִים קָדוֹשׁ הוּא עֹבֵר עָלֵינוּ תָּמִיד

[271] וְהָיָה הַנִּשְׁאָר בְּצִיּוֹן וְהַנּוֹתָר בִּירוּשָׁלַם קָדוֹשׁ יֵאָמֶר לוֹ כָּל־הַכָּתוּב לַחַיִּים בִּירוּשָׁלָם

[272] וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל־זֶה וְאָמַר קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת מְלֹא כָל־הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ

[273] אֶת־שֵׁם קָדְשִׁי אוֹדִיעַ בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְלֹא־אַחֵל אֶת־שֵׁם־קָדְשִׁי עוֹד וְיָדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְהוָה קָדוֹשׁ בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל

[274] וְאֶל־מִי תְדַמְּיוּנִי וְאֶשְׁוֶה יֹאמַר קָדוֹשׁ

[275] Landy, pp. 142-3.

attributing it to the fact that God is different than humanity. Instead, God is revealing a vital piece of information via Hosea. *B'kir'b'cha qadosh* must mean, "in your presence, I am holy." Which means that within the context of Hosea, God is holy – specifically and only – in the presence of Israel!

In order to confirm this reading, we must ask, when was God not "in the midst" of Israel. The answer, cleverly suggested by Hosea 11:8, is during the destruction of the cities of the plain! *Admah* and *Zeboim* are mentioned together with holiness here, but not in Genesis when we learn of their destruction. The importance of this phrase in Hosea, then, becomes apparent when we see how God acted previously. God destroyed those five cities with utter menace – in a fashion that could hardly be called "holy."[276] Since God was not in Israel's presence, God was free to act in any manner – even in an "unholy" fashion.

It is important to note that the question of God's holiness is unique to Hosea 11 because it only applies to situations when God is both angry and in the presence of Israel. For example, God was not angry in Sodom; instead, God's messengers announce to Lot that they will destroy the city since "the outcry against them before Adonai has become so great that Adonai has sent us to destroy it."[277] Since God was not angry, God was not presented with an opportunity to act in a holy manner. As stated previously, enacting appropriate consequences is within God's purview, and does not impact one way or the other on God's holiness. In Hosea, though, when God is angry, God refuses to act on that anger. It would not be holy to destroy out of anger. Out of consequence perhaps, but not

---

[276] Regardless which of the many possible definitions for holy we accept, wiping out these cities does not seem to describe an act that represents the holy. There are many other aspects of God which may apply to this sort of vengeance, but not specifically holiness.

[277] JPS translation, with modified God language.

out of anger. In the opposite sense, Jeremiah speaks of *haron* (anger) often. In each case, this anger is directed at Israel's enemies. Since God is not in the presence of Israel as in Hosea, God, again does not have the opportunity to act in a holy manner – and we find no mention of holiness in these passages. It seems that holiness can only be attributed to God when both conditions of anger and Israel are met – and in that situation, we seem to have a different, new, and surprising God!

What is the impact of attributing God's holiness to God's presence amidst Israel? One surprising answer emerges from the Hosea text itself. Beeby notes "there is a radical, almost violent change as we pass from v. 9 to v. 10 …. metaphors of compassion give way to lions; the apparently vacillating God becomes imperial and utterly in control."[278] Why such a dramatic change in tone? What if the paradigm shift in vv. 7-8 was not just a revelation to Hosea or the reader, but to God, as well? The prophet here represents God as one who has just, essentially, lost the power to rule absolutely, the power to execute judgment. God has just discovered an inherent weakness in Godself, a finitude. God cannot act in any manner aside from holiness when in the presence of Israel – for the presence of Israel confers holiness upon God. Quickly absorbing that psychological blow, God recovers and acts to reassert God's absolute control and authority. But it is a shield behind which God is actually cowering, or perhaps not cowering so much as shaking with the realization of a suddenly limited self, holy – specifically and only – in the presence of beloved Israel!

Was God holy before there was a nation Israel? Perhaps not. The word *Qadosh* appears only one time prior to Exodus 19:6, where it refers to Israel as a holy nation. For all God's awesome work of creation and beautiful relationships from Adam to Abraham

---

[278] Beeby, pp. 146-7.

to Moses, the only time *Qadosh* is mentioned until after Israel becomes a nation at Sinai is for Shabbat (Gen. 2:3), a creation which will come to require both divine and human interaction.[279]

A preponderance of commentators concur that Hosea 11, and specifically vv. 8-9, is a vital key to our understanding of God and the Bible.[280] Beeby makes perhaps the grandest statement, saying "I am confident that here we penetrate deeper into the heart and mind of God than anywhere else in the OT."[281] I would aver that while many commentators recognize this to be a passage of enormous importance in defining God, most fail to draw their conclusions about God from the text and instead fall into previous patterns that fit with their preconceived notions vis-à-vis God's relationship with Israel. Schungel-Straumann understands that "the question at issue was not theoretical monotheism ... but rather the question of *what kind* of God this YHWH is, and *how* he relates to Israel."[282] Hosea is not defining a relationship as much as he is defining God! In the end, Hosea is gently suggesting that God is not simply holy, but is holy in our presence.[283] In relation to us! The relationship between God and Israel creates holiness.

---

[279] We are reminded over and over in Leviticus that we should be holy, since God is holy (cf Lev. 11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8). Finally, *Qadosh* appears in Deuteronomy, in every case but one to call Israel a holy people. We have already seen that, in Prophets, *Qadosh* most often was combined with Israel to create a title for God. Here, throughout the Torah, Qadosh primarily refers to Israel and God together. The overwhelming message is that God, Israel and holiness all go together.

[280] Schungel-Straumann (p. 210) says, "verse 9b then presents the reasons for YHWH's unusual and unexpected action, and here we find ourselves at the climax of all the statements made in this chapter." Yee (p. 224) says, "we get a rare glimpse here (v.8) of the personality of God on the verge of destroying his 'son' and yet balking." Fontaine (p. 59) says, "by delving into the deepest darkness of human emotions, Hosea came into contact with the heart of his god." Davies (p. 261) says that vv. 8-9 offer "a rare glimpse into the complex motives that operate in Yahweh's character."

[281] Beeby, p. 140. He continues (p. 145) to explain that "to the dialogue with the Deuteronomic law is now added a far more significant dialogue – the dialogue of God with himself in which law and grace, goodness and severity do battle. Other places in the OT speak of God repenting, and elsewhere he is recorded as changing his mind, but nowhere else is there such an awesome unveiling of his own inner conversation."

[282] Schungel-Straumann, pp. 194-5.

[283] This leaves open a tantalizing question: is it possible that God is 'not holy' when not in the presence of Israel? This would make for fascinating further study.

Although the preceding analysis is obviously specific to Hosea 11, the important concepts apply to our broader conversation about the meaning of holiness in *Tanakh*. Grossman has written that "the 'highest value' which holiness indicates and .... the actions of holiness are performed in the relationship of man and god and not the relationship of man and man."[284] And Helen Freeman has argued that "holiness [in a modern sense] can exist wherever the individual Jew turns towards God."[285] Although they are making different points, both scholars seem to understand at least one aspect of a fundamental truth that Hosea teaches us: holiness is created – even in God – by our human interactions with God.[286]

---

[284] Grossman, p. 390.

[285] Freeman, p. 60.

[286] Although it strays slightly from our focus, there is a fascinating midrash on Isaiah 43:12 that reads its meaning as: if you are my witnesses, then I am God. If you are not, then I am not God. A striking possibility to think that our human actions may not only impact God's holiness, but God's very existence as God!

Chapter 8:
"And you shall be holy"

Leviticus 19:2 is one of the most famous, oft-quoted, and perhaps misunderstood verses in the entire *Tanakh*:

דַּבֵּר אֶל־כָּל־עֲדַת בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ
אֲלֵהֶם קְדֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ כִּי קָדוֹשׁ אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃

I translate this verse as, "Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them: You will be holy, for I, Adonai your God, am holy." Many people point to this verse as the ultimate statement of our purpose as Jews. But in light of our preceding analysis, how should we understand the imperative in Leviticus 19:2? What does it mean to "be holy"?

Grossman begins to provide an answer by telling us that holiness "specifies the coincidence of the wills of man and God and defines the freedom of both. That freedom expresses itself as the voluntary, continuous, cooperative maintenance of the world – sanctification, *kedusha*."[287] If, however, holiness is meant to be used as a way to maintain society (as Douglas and others confirm in our chapter 6 analysis), we are still left with the important question of, "how?"

Although an analysis of Leviticus 19:2 is necessarily specific to this set of verses and leaves out the range of holiness found elsewhere in *Tanakh*, I believe we can use this text as a good model for exploring yet a broader picture of what holiness means in the entire *Tanakh*. By exploring the specific nature of this call to be holy, we may be able to better define what the holiness is that we continue to strive for today.

---

[287] Grossman, p. 390.

Classic approaches

Jewish thinkers have wondered about the meaning of Leviticus 19:2 for a long time. Rashi, for example, believed that the call to holiness in 19:2 referred back to the illicit sexual practices listed in chapter 18. Milgrom, however, offers a more standard approach in assuming that "the rest of the chapter [19] sets the people of Israel on the road to holiness" and that the range of laws "spoke powerfully to the ancient Israelite, enabling the common citizen to achieve the holiness that had hitherto been limited to the priests."[288] In fact, some of our ancient rabbis understood it in this fashion: Rabbi Hiyya taught that chapter 19 contains most of the essential laws of the Torah, while Rabbi Levi said that the full 10 Commandments are found here.[289] According to their way of thinking – which might reasonably be assumed to be similar to that of the Levitical author(s) – the commandments in the Torah provide the path to holiness. But how might the text itself reveal this path?

Milgrom follows Schwartz by breaking the entire chapter into 18 units, punctuated by the inscription "you shall be holy," of which the vast majority offer ethical commandments rather than ritual commandments. In fact, the grouping of laws here addresses "the most pressing problems in H's time ... by which holiness may be achieved."[290] This assumes the validity of one argument presented earlier, that this H material is a response to the stinging rebuke of the 8th century prophets, particularly Isaiah. It is, therefore, a very functional program and does not assume that these laws represent a universal, timeless call to holiness; rather, the holiness offered in Leviticus 19 is specific to this time and place (which may lead us to conclude that holiness in our time

---

[288] Milgrom, p. 212.
[289] Leviticus Rabba 24.
[290] Milgrom, p. 214.

would similarly need to be measured not in the specific injunctions of Leviticus, but in responses to the specific needs of our day and our society).

Clearly, this entire section refers somehow to holiness, but there are a number of examples which offer a glimpse into its specific nature. For example, verse 3 opens the list of detailed laws found in chapter 19 by saying that each of us should "fear" our mother and father. The language is important, as it differs from the word choice in the Decalogue of Exodus 20:12. There, we are told to "honor" our parents, which is a very different expression than to fear them or hold them in awe. Assuming for a moment that the redactors of the Leviticus text knew what Exodus said, they seem to be telling us that if our goal is holiness, then fear is a more appropriate path than honor. Honoring one's parents may include love and care and respect, but fear demands a level of obedience and even quiescence. If a parent is one who both cares for us and one who guides us, perhaps we are being told that holiness is more about following parental instructions than it is about receiving parental love.

Kamionkowsky takes a different approach, noting that in Leviticus 19, "holiness is dynamic and constantly shifting according to our actions in the world."[291] The holiness we find in the myriad laws from this chapter present a broad definition for holiness depending on a specific action or need. Specifically, she argues that

> The heart of the Ten Commandments is expressed through the
> mention of three core *mitzvot*: remember that YHVH is the
> proper God of Israel, do not worship any other gods, and observe
> *Shabbat*. The inclusion of respect for one's parents is
> outstanding here. As the first law in this collection, it emphasizes
> the teaching of *bein adam l'chaveroh* – that Israel brings holiness
> into its communities with attention to the realm of everyday life,
> and that begins at home.[292]

---

[291] Kamionkowsky, p. 3.
[292] Kamionkowsky, p. 3.

To her way of thinking, by bringing this particular element of the Decalogue forward, Leviticus 19 reminds us that the path to holiness is accessible to everyone.

Verse 4 confirms much of this analysis. Only after the call to fear parents and observe Shabbat do we find here a repetition of the clear ban on idolatry. This is explicitly reversed from the Decalogue, which places strong statements about God and idolatry first, followed by Shabbat and parents. It appears to be a not-so-subtle message that on the path to holiness, ethical and human concerns come first – even before the way we treat our relationship with God!

Throughout Leviticus 19, there is a series of statements reinforcing this ethical structure. Verses 9-10, for example, talk about leaving food for the needy, and then verse 14 instructs us not to curse the deaf or place a stumbling block before the blind. Milgrom suggests that these terms "cannot be taken literally; rather, 'deaf' and 'blind' are metonyms for all the helpless, and 'curse' and 'stumbling block' stand for abuse and harm."[293] While this is a powerful statement of general concern for the helpless, Leviticus 19 is made up primarily of very specific laws which people can understand and follow easily.

Verses 17-18 offer two versions of the so-called "Golden Rule." Interestingly, the first is followed by a call to "reprove" your fellow. This appears to point to a sense of control necessary in our relationships. It is not enough to love people or treat them well; if we are to achieve holiness – individually or as a community – we are required to help each other by setting boundaries. And not only for ourselves, but for our neighbors, as well.

---

[293] Milgrom, p. 216.

To conclude these verses, Leviticus 19 takes us all the way back to our time as slaves in Egypt as a way to remind us to treat strangers well. This effectively universalizes the ethical message of the preceding verses, as they apply not only to Israel but to all who reside within it.

Referring to this entire collection, Ramban picks up on one theme and reminds us that it is possible to follow these laws but still go too far by indulging excessively in legal behaviors. For him, holiness means exercising self-control within these guidelines. In several places, we noted that some form of boundaries, control, or guidelines are appropriate to the discussion on how we achieve holiness. As we will see in the next section, a very different kind of analysis may lead to a very similar conclusion.

A structural approach

The preceding analysis effectively defines the reach of holiness, but it still does not articulate specifically what holiness is. What is this holiness that all of Israel can strive for within the context of the Holiness Code and specifically Leviticus 19? In order to answer that question, the first task is to determine how Leviticus 19 fits into the overall picture of the Torah. It is the middle book not only physically, but thematically. Moshe Kline offers the following schematic to illustrate the place of Leviticus within the Torah:

<u>Structure of the Torah</u>

Book of Torah		Schematic Content of Book
Genesis		Prologue
Exodus	a	Leaving Egypt
	b	Building the Tabernacle
Leviticus		The Tabernacle Service
Numbers	a	Dedicating the Tabernacle
	b	Preparing to enter Canaan
Deuteronomy		Epilogue

According to Kline[294] the symmetry noted in the books of the Torah corresponds to the symmetry with which the Torah describes the Israelite encampment in the desert as three concentric circles. The innermost circle is that of the Tabernacle, the dwelling place of the Divine presence. The next circle, moving outward, represents the holy camp of the Levites. The outermost circle represents the unconsecrated camp of the other tribes. Within the innermost circle are three further concentric divisions. The Tabernacle contains a courtyard, an outer chamber, and an inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies. The Torah, then, represents the same idea in its narrative, by placing Leviticus as the literal and literary center of the Torah. Leviticus includes very little historical narrative, and is connected to both Exodus and Numbers by the theme of the Tabernacle.

Once we understand that Leviticus is both the center of the Torah and its central element, we can turn to the structure of Leviticus itself. Once again, we find that there is a focal symmetry, to use Kline's phrase, which points at a specific section as its core – chapter 19. Douglas says that "chapter 19 is central only because of the way it is framed by" chapters 18 and 20, which sit as "pillars on either side of a shrine."[295] Kline builds on her discoveries, and notes that Leviticus 18 offers a list of prohibited relationships while

---

[294] The following section includes summarized elements of Moshe Kline's fascinating analysis, which can be found at: http://chaver.com
[295] Douglas, p. 234, 236.

Leviticus 20 contains the punishments for these transgressions. Why, he asks, are they separated by chapter 19? If at the end of our analysis we conclude that Leviticus 19 is, indeed, "the central text of the Torah, the fact that chapters 18 and 20 relate to each other can then be explained by focal symmetry. They are placed symmetrically around the central text. This is similar to the way the historical narrative of the Torah appears in the first part of Exodus and the second part of Numbers, symmetrically enclosing the Tabernacle material."[296]

It is not enough, however, merely to note that chapters 18-20 seem to form a unit if we are to label chapter 19 as the thematic core of the Book of Leviticus. And so, Kline breaks up the entire book into units and chapters, as such:

Unit	Chapter
I	1-3
II	4-5
III	6-7
IV	8-10
V	11
VI	12
VII	13
VIII	14
IX	15
X	16
XI	17
XII	18
XIII	19
XIV	20
XV	21
XVI	22:1-25
XVII	22:26-end
XVIII	23
XIX	24
XX	25
XXI	26
XXII	27

---

[296] Kline, "Focal Symmetry" on http://chaver.com

Now, with the various units delineated, he continues by placing all of them into a series

of subject classifications based on triads and units:

Subjects of the Triads and Units

Triads	Units		
	First	Second	Third
A Sacrifices	**I** For God, The Divine Perspective	**II** For Atonement Between Man and God	**III** For the Priests, The Human Perspective
B Ritual	**IV** Consecration of Priests and Tabernacle, Ritual Eating	**V** Animals, Edibility, Ritual Purity	**VI** Human Birth, Ritual Purification
██████	██████	██████	██████
D Acts of Individuals	**X** Holy, High Priest, Purification Ritual	**XI** Animal Slaughter, Ritual/Food	**XII** Mundane, Individual, Illicit Sex
	XIII		
E Intimacy	**XIV** Mundane	**XV** Priestly	**XVI** Holy
F Time	**XVII** Individual	**XVIII** Public	**XIX** Divine
G Redemption	**XX** Mundane, The Jubilee	**XXI** The Holy and The Mundane	**XXII** Holy

At this point, we have a nearly symmetrical structure which reflects Kline's work

on the "natural divisions" within the text. He explains:

> The middle unit of each triad is a conceptual middle. It can be
> read as a synthesis between the other two units of the triad. As a
> lemma to the principle of the conceptual middle, the first and
> third units of each unit can be read as opposites. Each triad then
> can be seen in the format of "thesis, antithesis, synthesis" with
> the synthesis in the middle between the thesis and the antithesis.
> For example, look at triad G, which consists of chapters 25-27

and units XX-XXII. All three chapter-units deal with different aspects of redemption. Chapter 25 details the laws of redemption connected to the jubilee year. The redemption of land, slaves and debts are civil acts. Their purpose is to ensure social stability, "You shall observe My laws and faithfully keep My rules, that you may live upon the land in security" (25:18). The antithesis of secular redemption appears in unit XXII, chapter 27. It details the redemption of sacrosanct objects which have been dedicated to God. The synthesis between the secular aspect of redemption in unit XX and the redemption of the sacred in XXII appears in the theme of the relationship between God and Israel in unit XXI. This relationship leads to national redemption, facilitated by God. Therefore we can identify triad G as a structural unit and, in a similar manner, each of the other six triads. Here is a preliminary summary of the subjects of the triads, as well as each of the units as part of a triad.[297]

There is also a mirrored relationship in the holy-mundane split among most chapters. In triads A, B, and D the first unit reflects holy or divine concerns, while the third unit reflects human or mundane concerns. In triads E, F, and G it is reversed, with the mundane in the first unit and the holy in the third. The only unit that strays from this pattern is triad C. Interestingly, this is a unit dealing with the impure and outcasts. According to Kline's reading, when we take a meta-approach to this structure, it is telling us quite directly to remove it from the structure. Not only is it talking about outcasts, but as an exception to the structural pattern previously exhibited it represents those who are impure or outcast and in need of removal from the "camp." That is the reason Kline highlights it in the structure above. As a result, if we (temporarily) remove triad C, we are left with what Kline calls the "Pure Form of Leviticus":
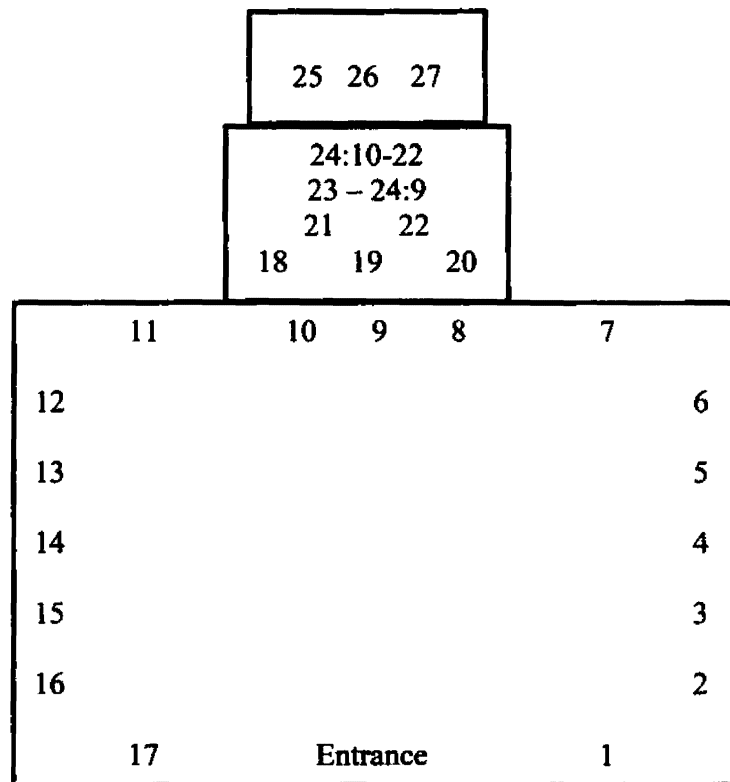
---

[297] Kline, "A Structural Analysis of Leviticus" on http://chaver.com

The Pure Form of Leviticus

Triads	Units		
	I	II	III
A	Divine	Middle	Human
B	IV	V	VI
	Holy	Middle	Mundane
D	X	XI	XII
	Holy	Middle	Mundane
		XIII	
E	XIV	XV	XVI
	Mundane	Middle	Holy
F	XVII	XVIII	XIX
	Mundane	Middle	Holy
G	XX	XXI	XXII
	Mundane	Middle	Holy

In this diagram, we can clearly see that unit 13 (corresponding to Leviticus 19) sits at the structural, thematic, and literal center of the Book of Leviticus. The remaining task, then, is to determine why the book would be structured in this fashion, and to reveal the implicit message it is attempting to convey.

In a fit of anthropological flair, Douglas describes Leviticus as a representation of the Tabernacle itself, and views its various chapters as progressive chambers within the Tabernacle. In other words, just as she has written that the Tabernacle is a physical representation of both the Holy mountain of God and of the human body, she now sees a direct connection between the written image presented in Leviticus and the Tabernacle that its writers used as a foundational metaphor. Specifically, she envisions the chapters in Leviticus corresponding to the three chambers of the Tabernacle as follows:

```
                    25   26   27

                     24:10-22
                    23 – 24:9
                     21      22
                18      19      20

        11          10   9    8         7

12                                          6

13                                          5

14                                          4

15                                          3

16                                          2

        17          Entrance            1
```

In a wonderfully evocative phrase, Douglas tells us to "imagine the reader using the Book of Leviticus as a guide around the tabernacle."[298] This Priestly text is not merely reciting for us a litany of laws and commandments, it is painting a picture and offering us a guided tour! Again, Kline picks up on Douglas's work and expands upon it. Douglas views a straight progression – the first 17 chapters in Leviticus represent the outer courtyard, chapters 18-24 represent the inner chamber, while the final three chapters (25-27) represent the inmost holy of holies. As we progress through Leviticus, we move our way deeper into the Tabernacle. Kline, on the other hand, takes the Douglas model of the chapters in Leviticus physically representing the Tabernacle, but begins with the question of chapter 19. Since this chapter contains many elements of the

---

[298] Douglas, p. 222.

Decalogue in various forms, we might imagine it as a "literary representation of the Ark containing the (shattered) stone tablets. That would place it in the 'center', within the Holy of Holies."[299] Following this analogy, triads D and E would be the Holy of Holies and would "contain" the Ark. Continuing outward from the middle, triads B and F would represent the outer chamber of the Tent of Meeting and would hold items such as the menorah and the incense altar. Finally, triads A and G are the outermost areas of the Tabernacle including the courtyard and sacrificial altar.

If we accept Kline's model, we are left with two apparent mysteries: what happened to triad C, and why are the two blocks on either side of chapter 19 reversed? Contrary to Douglas's belief that we are looking at an image of the Tabernacle, Kline postulates that we are viewing "a recording of a trip through it. Triads A, B and D record the progress from the outside inward, while triads E, F and G retrace the journey from the inside out. The reversal of direction explains the reversal of the two large blocks: what was on the right going in is on the left going out."[300]

In terms of triad C, then, we must remember that only one person was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, and only on one specific day: the High Priest on *Yom Kippur*. Further, on that occasion, he undertook a specific ritual which included filling both chambers with smoke before entering the inner sanctum. Following Douglas, Kline suggests that Triad C is a literary smokescreen: "Like smoke, it is both there and not there. In order to see the symmetrical structure built around the Ark, we have to ignore,

---

[299] Kline at: http://chaver.com
[300] Kline at: http://chaver.com

or look through, the smoke screen. Leviticus is a literary conceit constructed according to the path of the High Priest on Yom Kippur."[301]

According to Kline's analysis, we read the Book of Leviticus as if we were the High Priest on Yom Kippur, entering and then exiting the Holy of Holies. What a marvelous opportunity! As in many other ancient systems, the most sacrosanct space was unavailable to all but a revered few. But in literary form, Leviticus makes it available to the entire community. Determining the content of this *K'dosh K'doshim*, then, is our next step.

Up to this point, we have pursued one potential reading of these texts; namely, that the entire Torah points to Book of Leviticus as its core, and Leviticus points to chapter 19 as its core. What about the contents of Leviticus 19 itself? Jonathan Magonet indicates that "no overall structure emerges" for chapter 19 and its overall meaning "remains elusive."[302] And yet, a close examination reveals that within verses 3-18, there are 5 phrases which reappear in verses 30-36. These sections demarcate a repetition similar to that which we find both in Leviticus 18 and 20, and in Kline's assessment of Leviticus as a whole:
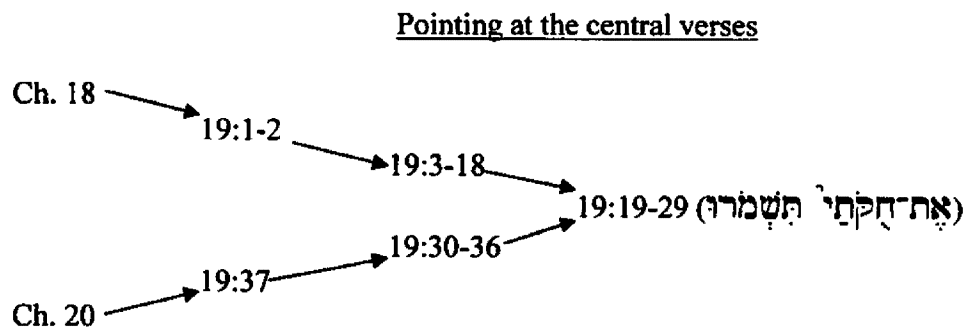
<u>Key repetitions between verses 3-18 and 30-36</u>

3b	וְאֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ	30	אֶת־שַׁבְּתֹתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ
4a	אַל־תִּפְנוּ אֶל־הָאֱלִילִים	31a	אַל־תִּפְנוּ אֶל־הָאֹבֹת
14c	וְיָרֵאתָ מֵּאֱלֹהֶיךָ	32c	וְיָרֵאתָ מֵּאֱלֹהֶיךָ
15a	לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ עָוֶל בַּמִּשְׁפָּט	35a	לֹא־תַעֲשׂוּ עָוֶל בַּמִּשְׁפָּט
18c	וְאָהַבְתָּ לְרֵעֲךָ כָּמוֹךָ	34b	וְאָהַבְתָּ לוֹ כָּמוֹךָ

[301] Kline at: http://chaver.com
[302] Magonet, p. 151.

Including the introduction in verses 1-2, we find that verses 1-18 and 30-37 (including the conclusion in 37) isolate verses 19-29 as the literal and literary center of chapter 19. According to Magonet, verses 19-29 are "subsumed under the new subheading *'et-huqqotay tismoru*."[303] As a result, we find that, just as the Torah points to Leviticus, and Leviticus points to chapter 19, chapter 19 itself points to a number of key verses which are demarcated as central to the chapter in terms of their meaning and importance:

<u>Pointing at the central verses</u>

Ch. 18

19:1-2

→19:3-18

19:19-29 (אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ)

19:30-36

19:37

Ch. 20

Once Magonet completes his analysis and demonstrates that verses 19-29 are the focal center of chapter 19, we can read them in detail and ask: What are these verses telling us? Is there a commonality among these verses? What is, according to this reading, the central message of chapter 19, of Leviticus, and of entire Torah?

At first glance, this section seems to contain a series of unrelated laws. But a closer look may reveal a pattern within these verses that will help us decode their placement at such a central place in the Torah.

---

[303] Magonet, p. 152.

¹⁹ אֶת־חֻקֹּתַי תִּשְׁמֹרוּ בְּהֶמְתְּךָ לֹא־תַרְבִּיעַ כִּלְאַיִם שָׂדְךָ
לֹא־תִזְרַע כִּלְאָיִם וּבֶגֶד כִּלְאַיִם שַׁעַטְנֵז לֹא יַעֲלֶה עָלֶיךָ׃ פ
²⁰ וְאִישׁ כִּי־יִשְׁכַּב אֶת־אִשָּׁה שִׁכְבַת־זֶרַע וְהִוא שִׁפְחָה נֶחֱרֶפֶת
לְאִישׁ וְהָפְדֵּה לֹא נִפְדָּתָה אוֹ חֻפְשָׁה לֹא נִתַּן־לָהּ בִּקֹּרֶת
תִּהְיֶה לֹא יוּמְתוּ כִּי־לֹא חֻפָּשָׁה׃
²¹ וְהֵבִיא אֶת־אֲשָׁמוֹ לַיהוָה אֶל־פֶּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֵיל אָשָׁם׃
²² וְכִפֶּר עָלָיו הַכֹּהֵן בְּאֵיל הָאָשָׁם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה עַל־חַטָּאתוֹ
אֲשֶׁר חָטָא וְנִסְלַח לוֹ מֵחַטָּאתוֹ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא׃ פ
²³ וְכִי־תָבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ וּנְטַעְתֶּם כָּל־עֵץ מַאֲכָל וַעֲרַלְתֶּם
עָרְלָתוֹ אֶת־פִּרְיוֹ שָׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים יִהְיֶה לָכֶם עֲרֵלִים לֹא יֵאָכֵל׃
²⁴ וּבַשָּׁנָה הָרְבִיעִת יִהְיֶה כָּל־פִּרְיוֹ קֹדֶשׁ הִלּוּלִים לַיהוָה׃
²⁵ וּבַשָּׁנָה הַחֲמִישִׁת תֹּאכְלוּ אֶת־פִּרְיוֹ לְהוֹסִיף לָכֶם תְּבוּאָתוֹ
אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם׃
²⁶ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ עַל־הַדָּם לֹא תְנַחֲשׁוּ וְלֹא תְעוֹנֵנוּ׃
²⁷ לֹא תַקִּפוּ פְּאַת רֹאשְׁכֶם וְלֹא תַשְׁחִית אֵת פְּאַת זְקָנֶךָ׃
²⁸ וְשֶׂרֶט לָנֶפֶשׁ לֹא תִתְּנוּ בִּבְשַׂרְכֶם וּכְתֹבֶת קַעֲקַע לֹא תִתְּנוּ
בָּכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה׃
²⁹ אַל־תְּחַלֵּל אֶת־בִּתְּךָ לְהַזְנוֹתָהּ וְלֹא־תִזְנֶה הָאָרֶץ וּמָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ זִמָּה

¹⁹ You shall observe My laws. You shall not let your cattle mate with a different kind; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed; you shall not put on cloth from a mixture of two kinds of material. ²⁰ If a man has carnal relations with a woman who is a slave and has been designated for another man, but has not been redeemed or given her freedom, there shall be an indemnity; they shall not, however, be put to death, since she has not been freed. ²¹ But he must bring to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as his guilt offering to Adonai, a ram of guilt offering. ²² With the ram of guilt offering the priest shall make expiation for him before Adonai for the sin that he committed; and the sin that he committed will be forgiven him. ²³ When you enter the land and plant any tree for food, you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden for you, not to be eaten. ²⁴ In the fourth year all its fruit shall be set aside for jubilation before Adonai; ²⁵ and only in the fifth year may you use its fruit -- that its yield to you may be increased: I Adonai am your God. ²⁶ You shall not eat anything with its blood. You shall not practice divination or soothsaying. ²⁷ You shall not round off the side-growth on your head, or destroy the side-growth of your beard. ²⁸ You shall not make gashes in your flesh for the dead, or incise any marks on yourselves: I am Adonai. ²⁹ Do not degrade your daughter and make her a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry and the land be filled with depravity.[304]

---

[304] JPS translation, with modified God language. ·

This section of laws may be broken down into five elements, beginning with a prohibition against three types of mixtures in verse 19. Verses 20-22 describe a legal situation where two categories of status – in this case a free man and a slave woman – come into conflict with one another. Next, verses 23-25 tell us what to do with the produce of newly-planted fruit trees. While they may appear to be nothing more than miscellany, the laws against eating flesh with blood, sorcery and divination, and cutting hair or flesh in verses 26-28 might reasonably be grouped as somehow related to abuse of the body, whether external or internal through eating or drinking (which is thought to be an element of divination). And finally, verse 29 is a prohibition against profaning one's daughter.

In order to gain some perspective on these particular verses, it may be necessary to look at their literary context. Leading up to verses 19-29 we find a series of laws about people's relationships. According to Magonet's reading, verses 3-8 deal with a person's relationship to God. These include familiar commandments such as keeping the Sabbath, refraining from idol worship, and the correct way to sacrifice. Verses 9-18, on the other hand, deal with a person's relationship to their neighbors. Here we find ordinances about providing food for the needy, and a number of legal prohibitions against stealing, swearing falsely, fraud, and robbery. It also includes important social provisions such as paying wages on time, treating the deaf and the blind appropriately, making fair decisions, showing no favoritism to the rich, and treating other members of the community with appropriate respect.

Once Leviticus 19 has described the correct way to interact with God and with our neighbors, the text turns to the appropriate ways to deal with ourselves. The seemingly-disparate laws in verses 19-29

> All deal in some way with a man's relationship to his own possessions: his animals, crops and clothing (v. 19); his slaves (20-22); his land (23-25); his body (26-28); his offspring, his daughter (v. 29). This would also explain their juxtaposition with the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" by exploring your relationship to your "self" as expressed through a sequence, again moving from outer to inner: your property, your body, your seed.[305]

Taking it one step further, Magonet notes that each of these five injunctions revolves around the "limits imposed upon your freedom to use your property, expressed through prohibitions on making 'unnatural' mixtures."[306] In verse 19, for example, the interbreeding of animals would interfere with the natural order of creation. Verses 20-22 address the boundaries which exist between the states of slavery and freedom; crossing this boundary causes problems. Similarly, verses 23-25 tell us that the Land is ours only so far as we recognize the limits to our freedom to utilize it. Verses 26-28 place limits on our ability to inflict physical abuse on our own bodies, and the juxtaposition of divination and mourning customs may highlight the boundary between life and death. Finally, verse 29 draws a boundary at legitimate sexual (and perhaps religious) practice.

Aside from the prologue (verses 1-2) and epilogue (verse 27), Magonet's analysis suggests that chapter 19 can be divided into 5 sections. Verses 3-8 and 30-31 deal with a person's relationship to God, while verses 9-18 and 32-36 deal with our relationships to other people. This leaves the central verses 19-29. We might assume that holiness would be found either in the relationships with God or with others, but Magonet shows how one

---

[305] Magonet, p. 165.
[306] Magonet, p. 165.

reading of the holiness material in chapter 19 makes a counterintuitive statement: in fact, it is the way we treat <u>ourselves</u> that can provide us with the opportunity to achieve holiness!

Although this argument is clearly supported by a creative reading of the Leviticus 19 text, it also seems to fly in the face of some of the material in our previous discussion. For example, we have noted how holiness is a charge to the community more than to the individual. We have also noted the specifically ethical nature of the H material, whereas this analysis – while devoid of priestly function – almost sounds like a cultic expression of specific actions necessary to preserve holiness. Nonetheless, I find this to be a compelling argument as to one potential meaning to be found within the text itself. Perhaps, for example, this very specific understanding is a starting point rather than a terminus. If holiness is about communal function, it still needs to start with individual action. And this series of laws would provide a strong foundation on which to build the sort of social structure that Douglas insists was the intent of holiness in the first place.

If this line of reasoning is to be useful, however, we must determine how Magonet would characterize its meaning. In fact, he continues to explain that "the structure of parts of the chapter may itself be intentionally working on the reader so as to refine his own sense of discrimination .... not merely the details of the laws but their organization and the very structure of the chapter itself convey meaning."[307] In other words, chapter 19, and specifically verses 19-29, provides us with an experiential education in how to achieve holiness. Once we live according to these particular laws, and begin to see how creating boundaries for ourselves leads to opportunities for growth, we will see that this can be a path to holiness! This would cleave nicely with the structure provided by both

---

[307] Magonet, pp. 166-7.

Douglas and Kline, as we discover that Leviticus is designed as a journey. The entire book is set up as an experiential model. Chapter 19 similarly provides its reader with a vivid experience as the Priestly writer H attempts to help us, his readers, figure out how to achieve holiness in our lives.

It is important to remember that, according to Wenham, the breadth of these laws "reinforces the idea that 'the diversity of material in this chapter reflects differentiation of life. All aspects of human affairs are subject to God's laws.'"[308] This is crucial, because it would be easy to point to verses 19-29 and say that these are relatively minor statutes, especially when compared to other sections of chapter 19 or chapters 18 and 20. However, it may be their seemingly-innocuous nature that the H writer used to offer a subtle clue to his intentions. Not only do these disparate laws represent the variety of life (which is necessary for holiness, since we need boundaries in all aspects of life, not just the "important" ones), but it is the ordinary events of daily life that provide us with the best opportunities for achieving – or at least creating the opportunity for – holiness.

I can't help but return to a parenting metaphor at this point. It may be apropos that biblical Judaism often presents God as our "father." What do parents use to help us make life livable? Boundaries. We need to know who we are. We need to know where we can and cannot go. We need to know what we are allowed and not allowed to do. Without boundaries, we remain insecure and unsure of ourselves – it is like being scared of the dark. When parents help us understand our boundaries, we are free to explore (within them) and learn and grow and excel. Boundaries allow us the opportunity to reach for our best selves. Holiness, then, can be viewed as that which provides us with the chance to

---

[308] Cited by Magonet, p. 151.

elevate ourselves and become the best we can be. That, in the end, is what brings us closest to God, our example and role model par excellence of highest attainment.

It also must be said that boundaries allow for connections. The typical definition of holiness as "separation" implies creating space and being apart. It demands otherness. But boundaries are more subtle than separation, as they allow two entities to connect. Separation may work for priests, but boundaries – and therefore holiness – is for all of us.

Concurring scholarship

Freeman writes that "the culture of holiness is defined by the mitzvoth, a system of transactions which allows human beings and God to be included within the boundaries of the same term."[309] Although she still falls within the context of a more standard definition for holiness, Freeman recognizes that holiness is about creating boundaries around and perhaps between God and humanity. Wright further argues that "the access laws in P and elsewhere do not just protect the sanctuary from encroachment and sacrilege, they sustain the borders between categories of persons in society. To carry it further, encroachment prohibitions do not just protect potential encroachers and the community from God's wrath, they protect the group from the confusion of social boundaries and thereby from social dissolution."[310] In other words, he understands that holiness creates social boundaries within which biblical society could thrive.

Perhaps the most complementary description is one presented by Eitan Mayer. He asks, "what does *kedusha* have to do with restrictions …. [t]he answer is that *kedusha*

---

[309] Freeman, p. 59.
[310] Wright, p. 248.

does not *produce* or *require* restrictions – it *is* restrictions!"[311] The idea of

restrictions is not quite the same as boundaries, but it is closely related. One of the many

things boundaries provide is a sense of limits or restriction. And so in a similar fashion to

my argument that boundaries can help us find the path to holiness, Mayer locates the

same path in the need for restrictions. In describing the practical example of *kashrut*, "we

do not refrain from eating these things in order to increase our holiness quotient; instead,

the *act* of refraining is the *kedusha* itself."[312] Similarly with the laws of Shabbat, Mayer

concludes that "*kedusha* does not create the *issur melakha* (prohibition on work); it *is*

the *issur melakha* …. *kedusha* is an opportunity-maker."[313]

I believe that although they present various arguments about the nature of

qedushah, many of the scholars presented here would concur with the fundamental claim

that holiness, as developed in Leviticus 19, presents an opportunity for Israel to achieve a

higher level of ethical action both as individuals and as a community. The last task is to

determine how this fits back into our overarching analysis of *qedushah* in *Tanakh*.

---

[311] Mayer, "Parsha Themes."
[312] Mayer, "Parsha Themes."
[313] Mayer, "Parsha Themes."

Chapter 9:
Conclusions and Further Study

I embarked upon this project in order to find the one, concrete, singular definition for *qedushah* that the *Tanakh* would certainly offer me. I thought the variety of answers to my original query about the definition of holiness was due to a broad-based lack of precision and clarity with regards to the use of that term. But after much analysis, it has become clear that one of the reasons my friends and colleagues offered so many definitions for holiness is that even the Tanakh cannot offer a simple, precise answer. For all the emphasis that our tradition and our Bible put on *qedushah*, its apparent meaning in *Tanakh* alters and grows and shifts throughout. Amidst a wide variety of examples, we have learned:

- Neither the word nor the concept of holiness originated with the Biblical text; in fact, the cultural and etymological roots of *q-d-sh* point in a number of different directions, including ideas like separation, radiance, purity, and the glory of God (see chapter 3).

- While God seems to be central to most ideas about holiness, there are times when even God is not holy (see chapters 4 and 7).

- Rather than simply indicating a quality or characteristic, holiness can be placed on a graded spectrum, from most holy to very unclean [most impure] (see chapter 5).

- While many have assumed holiness to be a construct of the priestly cult, in fact, it also springs forth as an ethical system available to all of Israel (see chapter 5)

- In some parts of *Tanakh*, holiness is conferred upon us; in others, we must strive for holiness (see chapter 5).

- The priests, prophets, and sages each respond to holiness with demands for a different type of what Grammie calls "cleanness" (see chapter 5).

- Holiness is dynamic in the Priestly texts and static in the Deuteronomic texts (see chapter 5).

- The structures of holiness were likely designed social tools in order to create and sustain biblical society (see chapter 6).

Taking Leviticus 19 as a primary example of the charge to "be holy" in *Tanakh*, I offered an analysis that *qedushah* is about creating boundaries for ourselves. As the preceding list demonstrates, this cannot be taken as a conclusive or unique definition for *qedushah* throughout the *Tanakh*. However, if we want to take this as a reasonable biblical definition, it would be helpful if it encompassed many of the various understandings of holiness previously explored. For example, holiness entails a boundary between God and humanity that exists in order to allow us to relate to one another in a beneficial way. Priests, prophets, and sages each set up a holiness system that provided boundaries for people that they believed would order society in the best possible way. Broadly speaking the P writer was clearly setting boundaries around the cult, while the H writer wanted to erect boundaries which would encourage people to create a moral society, and the D writer was interested in establishing a boundary in time after which the people would be required to follow the commandments by nature of their election.

Boundaries are tools that people use in order to create, structure, implement, and enforce their vision for the world. Boundaries allow for connection at a fundamental level, which is necessary for a thriving society. At its essence, that is what all forms of biblical religion did. And as Douglas and her colleagues demonstrate, the entire purpose of holiness was to aid in creating just such a society. In a sense, then, we could replace the translation "holiness" in Leviticus 19:2 and read it this way:

Make boundaries for yourself, for I, your God, have boundaries.

What might it mean for God to have boundaries? Is God limited? Might this help explain why God does not act in this world to allay suffering or conquer evil? I would

propose that the question of God's boundaries is but the first question that still needs

more attention. In addition, I offer these items which are in need of further examination:

1. If holiness is, to some extent, based on the intersection of God and humanity or the human realm, wouldn't we consider Moses to be the most holy of all? At the very least, Moses should be on the highest plane of holiness along with the Holy of Holies and perhaps the *Kohane Gadol*, who is in God's presence once a year. Moses had many close interactions with God, and was in God's direct presence more than once. Moses was on the mountain which was holy, as others could not touch it or die. Yet, Moses is never called holy – why not? Are there other things/people who are in God's presence but not holy? Are there things which are called holy but never in God's presence?

2. If holiness is about separation or separateness, why is it one-sided? In other words, Israel is declared holy by being separated from the rest of the nations – but aren't the other nations also, by definition, separated from Israel? Shabbat is separated from the rest of the week – but Shabbat and the other six days are separated from one another. How do we decide which side of the divide is considered "separate" and therefore holy? And if we have to decide, doesn't it mean that the separation itself is not actually what makes for holy?

3. As stated above, what would it mean for God to have boundaries?

Bibliography

- **Andersen**, F.I. and D.N. Freedman. *Hosea* (Anchor Bible). Doubleday, 1980.

- **Beeby**, H.D. *Hosea: Grace Abounding*. Wm. B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1989.

- **Berman**, Saul J. "Holiness, Meaning and Spirituality" in *The Edah Journal*, v. 2:1 (2002).

- --------. Lecture notes on "What is Qedusha?" September 3-7, 2005, by Aaron Dorfman.

- **Birnbaum**, Philip. *A Book of Jewish Concepts*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1964.

- **Brenner**, Athalya, ed. *A Feminist Companion to The Latter Prophets*. Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

- **Brueggemann**, Walter. *Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea*. John Knox Press, 1968.

- **Cothey**, Anthony. "Ethics and Holiness in the Theology of Leviticus" in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, v. 30:2 (2005), pp. 131-151.

- **Daniels**, Dwight R. *Hosea and Salvation History*. Walter de Gruyter, 1990.

- **Davies**, G.I. *New Century Bible Commentary: Hosea*. Marshall Pickering, 1992.

- **Diamond**, Barry. "The Biblical View of Purity and Holiness" as rabbinic thesis. HUC, 1991.

- **Douglas**, Mary. *Leviticus as Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

- **Emmerson**, Grace I. "Hosea: An Israelite Prophet in Judean Perspective" in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, supplement series v. 28*. Sheffield, 1984.

- **Fisch**, Harold, ed. *The Holy Scriptures, The Prophets*. Koren, 2001.

- **Fishbane**, Michael. *The JPS Commentary: Haftarot*. JPS, 2002.

- **Fontaine**, Carole, R. "A Response to 'Hosea'" in Brenner, Athalya, ed. *A Feminist Companion to The Latter Prophets*. Sheffield Academic Press, 1995.

- **Freeman**, Rabbi Helen. "Humour, Healing and Holiness" in *The Journal of Progressive Judaism*, v. 8 (1997), pp. 58-67.

- **Grammie**, John G. *Holiness in Israel*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989.

- **Grossman**, Allen. "Holiness" in Arthur A. Cohen and Paul Mendes-Flohr, *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*. New York: The Free Press, 1987, pp. 389-397.

- **Heschel**, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. Perennial Classics, 2001 (Original: Harper & Row, 1962).

- **Hildebrand**, David R. "Temple Ritual: A Paradigm for Moral Holiness in Haggai II 10-19" in *Vetus Testamentum*, v. 39:2 (1989), pp. 154-168.

- **Jenson**, Philip Peter. *Graded Holiness: A Key to the Priestly Conception of the World*. Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1992.

- **Kamionkowsky**, Tamar. "Kedoshim – Central Commentary" (draft), from forthcoming *Women's Reform Jewish Torah Commentary* (2007).

- **Kielkopf**, Charles F. "The Sense of the Holy and Ontological Arguments" in *The New Scholasticism*, v. 58 (1984), pp. 24-39.

- **Kline**, Moshe. "Whole Torah: An Integrative Approach to the Sources" on-line resources at (http://chaver.com/)

- **Knohl**, Israel. *The Divine Symphony*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2003.

- ———. "The Guilt Offering Law of the Holiness School (Num. V 5-8)" in *Vetus Testamentum*, v. 54:4 (2004), pp. 516-526.

- ———. "The Priestly Torah Versus the Holiness School: Sabbath and the Festivals" in *Hebrew Union College Annual*, v. 58 (1987), pp. 65-117.

- **Kornfeld**, W. and H. Ringgren. "QDS" in Botterwekck, G. Johannes, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament, v. 12 (qum – pasha)*. Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2003 (English Translation), pp. 521-545.

- **Kugler**, Robert A. "Holiness, Purity, the Body, and Society: The Evidence for Theological Conflict in Leviticus" in *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, v. 76 (December 1997), pp. 3-27.

- **Landy**, Francis. *Hosea*. Sheffield, 1997.

- **Levine**, Baruch (Commentary). *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989.

- ———. "The Language of Holiness: Perceptions of the Sacred in the Hebrew Bible" in Michael Patrick O'Connor and David Noel Freedman, editors. *Backgrounds for the Bible*. Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 1987, pp. 241-255.

- **Lipshitz**, Abe. *The Commentary of Abraham Ibn Ezra on Hosea*. The University of Chicago, 1974.

- **Magonet**, Jonathan. "The Structure and Meaning of Leviticus 19" in *Hebrew Annual Review*, v. 7 (1983), pp. 151-167.

- **Mayer**, Eitan. "Parsha Themes" on-line resource at (http://faculty.mc.yu.edu/emayer/parsha_shiurim/27shemini.html)

- **Mays**, James Luther. *Hosea: A Commentary*. The Westminster Press, 1969.

- **Milgrom**, Jacob. "The Dynamics of Purity in the Priestly System" in M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (eds.), *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus.* The Netherlands: Brill, 2000.

- --------. *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004.

- **Minkoff**, Dinah. "*Kedushah,* Holiness, and Ethics" in *The Jewish Bible Quarterly,* v. 29:2 (April – June 2001), pp. 106-112.

- **Otto**, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy.* London: Oxford University Press, 1924.

- **Poorthuis**, M.J.H.M. and J. Schwartz, eds. *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus.* The Netherlands: Brill, 2000.

- **Regev**, Eyal. "Priestly dynamic holiness" in *Vetus Testamentum,* v 51:2 (2001), pp. 243-61.

- **Ringgren**, Helmer. "The Prophetical Conception of Holiness" in *Uppsala Universitets Arssdrift.* Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1948.

- **Ross**, Allen P. *Holiness to the Lord: A Guide to the Exposition of the Book of Leviticus.* Michigan: Baker Academic, 2002.

- **Schungel-Straumann**, Helen. "God as Mother in Hosea 11" in Brenner, Athalya, ed. *A Feminist Companion to The Latter Prophets.* Sheffield Academic Press, 1995. (above).

- **Schwartz**, B.J. "Israel's Holiness: The Torah Traditions" in M. Poorthuis and J. Schwartz (eds.), *Purity and Holiness: The Heritage of Leviticus.* The Netherlands: Brill, 2000.

- **Smith**, Chani (ed). *K'dushah: A study guide for chavruta learning about holiness.* London: United Jewish Appeal and CAJE, 2001.

- **Steinbock**, Steven. *These Words Upon Our Heart: A Lexicon of Judaism and World Religions.* New York: UAHC Press, 2003.

- **Wolff**, H.H. *Hosea.* Fortress, 1974 (German ed. 1965).

- **Wright**, David P. "Holiness – Old Testament" in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary.* New York: Doubleday, 1992.

- **Yee**, Gale A. *Composition and Tradition in the Book of Hosea: A Redaction Critical Investigation.* Scholars Press, 1987.

- **Zanger**, Walter. "Violence and Holiness in Biblical Dan" in *Jewish Bible Quarterly,* v. 31:1 (2003), pp. 27-35.