



Does God Reside in a Particular Space?: The Philosophical Problem of Holiness

1) Why did God command us regarding the construction of the *Mishkan* saying 'I shall dwell among them' as if he were a defined corporeal being limited in space when the exact opposite is true? - For He is not corporeal, nor a material force, so how did they ascribe to Him a place. Did not God say of Himself, 'The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: where is the house that you would build for Me, and where is the place of My rest?'" (Isaiah 66:1).

Abarbanel (Born in Spain 1437, died in Venice,1508)

2) הַגָּה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַי הַשָּׁמַיִם, לֹא יִכְלָלוּךְ--אֵף, כִּי-הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתָ.

מלכים א' – פרק ח, פסוק כו

2) The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built.

Kings 1 – Chapter 8, Verse 27

3) אֲשֶׁר קִדְשׁוֹת הוּ, אֶרֶץ יִשְׂרָאֵל מְקֻדָּשֶׁת מִכָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת. וַיֵּמָּה הִיא קִדְשָׁתָהּ, שְׁמֵיבִיאים מִמִּנְהָ הַעֲלָמָר וְהַבְּבוּרִים וְשֵׁתֵי הַלֶּחֶם, מֵה שְׂאִין מִבִּיאים כֹּן מִכָּל הָאֲרָצוֹת :

מסכת כלים – פרק א, משנה ו

3) There are ten degrees of holiness. The land of Israel is sanctified more than any other land. Wherein lies its holiness? In that from it are brought the *omer*, the first fruits, and the two loaves [offered on Shavuot], which may not be brought from any other land.

Masechet Kelim –Chapter 1, Mishna 6

4) It is hard to understand how the God whose glory fills the earth can be said to reside in one place more than another. Why is the building in which He is worshiped more His 'house' than any other spot on earth? And what meaning can be given to the idea that there are degrees of sanctity in which one place is more holy than another? Does this mean that there is a greater degree of in-dwelling in the holier place, and if it does how can it be said that God is located more definitely in one spot, less in another? There are two different ways within monotheism of understanding the concept of a holy place. The first is to see the divine as somehow actually located in a quasi-physical manner in the sacred spot or, better, as especially manifested there. The second way is to see the holy place as hallowed by experience and association. On this view there is numinous power in the holy place, not due to any special in-dwelling of the divine but to the evocation of intense religious emotion [because] the place has been the scene of divine revelation or of sustained and fervent worship. It is history that hallows the shrine. The problem that has still to be faced by all theists is, how can God be everywhere without the universe ceasing to be anywhere or, conversely, if the universe is everywhere, how can God be anywhere? We are bound to conclude that statements such as 'God is everywhere' are themselves spatial and can be no more than metaphors.

Rabbi Louis Jacobs. "Holy Places" Conservative Judaism 37:3 1984



The Argument over Holiness/Holy Space in Jewish Medieval Jewish Philosophy

5) For [Yehuda] Halevi [Spain, 1075-1141] the commandments of the Torah reflect an antecedent reality... Holiness, for example, is something which actually inheres in holy places, things, people, and times. Were we able to invent a "holiness counter" it would click every time its wand came near something holy, just as a Geiger counter clicks in the presence of radioactivity. Radioactivity, of course, is present in the physical universe, while holiness is present only in the metaphysical universe, as it were. But just as radioactivity can have effects, even though it is not apprehended by the senses, so also holiness can have effects, even though it cannot be apprehended by the senses--there really is something there...

6) Maimonides... held a different view of holiness. According to [Maimonides'] view, holiness cannot be characterized as ontological or essentialist. Holy places, persons, times, and objects are in no objective way distinct from profane places, persons, times, and objects. Holiness is the name given to a certain class of people, objects, times, and places which the Torah marks off. According to this view holiness is a status, not a quality of existence. It is a challenge, not a given; normative, not descriptive. It is institutional (in the sense of being part of a system of laws) and hence contingent. This sort of holiness does not reflect objective reality; it helps constitute social reality. Holy places, persons, nations, times, and objects derive their sanctity from the roles they play, the uses to which they are put...Holiness it follows, must be *institutional*, a matter of halachic definition, not ontological, somehow actually in the universe.

Menachem Kellner [Emeritus Professor of Jewish Philosophy, U. of Haifa], Maimonides' Confrontation With Mysticism, 2006

The Modern Debate Over Sacred Space

7) Everything that is holy-the Land of Israel, Jerusalem, etc. - is no more than an aspect of the Torah, and it is sanctified by the holiness of the Torah. Do not imagine that the Temple and the Sanctuary are holy in and of themselves, God forbid! God dwells amongst His people, and if they transgress His covenant, they (the Temple and the Sanctuary) are bereft of their holiness and become as profane objects. The tablets, bearing the writing of God, are also not holy in and of themselves; but only for your sake. It is only for you that they are holy, and when the bride goes whoring from her canopy they become no more than pieces of clay; they are not holy in and of themselves, but only for you, if you keep the commandments engraved upon them In sum, there is nothing holy in the world. Only God is holy, and it is Him who is befitting of praise and worship. Holiness inheres in no created thing, except insofar as the people of Israel keeps the Torah in accordance with the will of the Creator.

R. Meir Simcha HaKohen of Dvinsk (Lithuania, 1843-1926), *Meshech Chochma*, Parshat Ki Tissa.

8) Exalting the land itself to the rank of holiness is idolatry *par excellence*. [The Mishnah states]: "There are ten degrees of holiness..." We are not told that the land is holy but that it is sanctified [מְקוֹדָשׁ]. The crucial point is what its holiness consists of: from it are brought the Omer and the first fruits and the two loaves of bread. These things are brought from the



land of Israel not because it is a holy land. The land is sanctified by the act of fulfilling the commandments to bring [these offerings]. By contrast with the intrinsic Holiness of God, there is no holiness in the world except sanctification through mitzvot.....

Holiness in the religious sense of this word... is nothing but halakhic observance; the specific intentional acts dedicated to the service of God... The idea of holiness as an immanent property of certain things – persons, locations, institutions, objects, or events – is a magical-mystical concept which smacks of idolatry. There is no holiness outside the sphere of divinity, which is the sphere shaped by the divine imperative, not by human values; a sphere in which human action is dedicated to service of God... “For you are a holy people” occurs in a context devoted in its entirety to halakhic practices.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz: Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State, 1992

9) The land of Israel is the Holy Land and the Temple Mount is a holy place only by virtue of the Mitzvoth linked to these locations. These Mitzvoth were not associated with the land and the mountain because these are “holy.” On the contrary, their “holiness” derives from the Mitzvot associated with them. The idea that a specific country or location has an intrinsic “holiness” is an indubitably idolatrous idea.

Yeshayahu Leibowitz, “The Territories.”

10) To be sacred, a thing had to be consecrated by a conscious act of man. The quality of holiness is not in the grain of matter. It is a preciousness bestowed upon things by an act of consecration and persisting in relation to God.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Sabbath

11) For them [the Rishonim], the attribute of kedushah, holiness, ascribed to the Land of Israel is an objective metaphysical quality inherent in the land. With all my respect for the Rishonim, I must disagree with such an opinion. I do not believe that it is halakhically cogent. Kedushah, under a halakhic aspect, is man-made; more accurately, it is a historical category. A soil is sanctified by historical deeds performed by a sacred people, never by any primordial superiority. The halakhic term *kedushat ha-aretz*, the sanctity of the land, denotes the consequence of a human act, either conquest (heroic deeds) or the mere presence of the people in the land (intimacy of man and nature). Kedushah is identical with man’s association with Mother Earth. Nothing should be attributed a priori to dead matter. Objective kedushah smacks of fetishism.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, The Emergence of Ethical Man

Israel’s Holiness: The Legacy of Rav Kook

12) The Land of Israel is an independent entity, tied up with the nation in a living bond, cherished or embraced because of its innate internal qualities. Because of this, it is impossible to categorize the nature of the holiness of the Land of Israel, and to bring to bear this deep love for her, with any rational human insight.

R. Abraham Isaac Kook [1865–1935], *Orot*

The land of Israel is not some external entity. It is not merely an external acquisition for the Jewish people. It is not merely a means of uniting the populace... Rather, the land of Israel



has an intrinsic meaning. It is connected to the Jewish people with the knot of life. Its very being is suffused with extraordinary qualities....

The imaginative faculty of the land of Israel is lucid and clear, clean and pure, and suitable for the appearance of divine truth... On the other hand, the imaginative faculty in the lands of the nations is turbid, mixed with darkness, in the shadows of impurity and corruption.....

If we are worthy, after our most extravagant praises, we might express one ten-thousandths of the desirability of that desirable land, the magnificent light of its Torah, the glorious light of its wisdom, and the holy spirit effervescent within it...The land of Israel—which is the land of God—improves the Jewish nation that dwells upon it as its eternal inheritance, an inheritance sealed with a covenant, a vow and a promise. The Jewish people's eternal nature is founded upon the divine nature permanent in the imprint of this wondrous desirable land.

Ibid, *Eretz Cheifetz*

13) [According to R. Avraham I. Kook] In the divine cosmic order, where every detail has its own place and *telos*, the true meaning of a person's action may be unknown to himself. He may fancy himself as motivated by A, yet the ultimate meaning of his action may be B. The same applies to the Zionist pioneers. They may subjectively think they are motivated by secular, political ideas, but truly they are acting within a cosmic scheme of a divine will, in which their seemingly secular and even atheistic motivation is nothing else than an external cover for the true meaning of their action as related to God's redemptive structure. These people may contribute toward the ultimate messianic coming even while they deny it; hence they have to be seen as tools and vessels in the hands of divine providence. Unbeknownst to themselves, they serve the labour of the divine. In Rabbi Kook's words, "a Jewish nationalist, no matter how secularist his intention may be, is, despite himself, imbued with the divine spirit even against his own will."

Professor Shlomo Avineri, *The Making of Modern Zionism*, 1981.

14) "Nineteen years ago, on the night when news of the United Nations decision in favor of the re-establishment of the state of Israel reached us, when the people streamed into the streets to celebrate and rejoice, I could not go out and join in the jubilation. I sat alone and silent; a burden lay upon me. During those first hours I could not resign myself to what had been done. I could not accept the fact that indeed 'they have...divided My land' (Joel 4:2) Yes [and now after 19 years] where is our Hebron--have we forgotten her?! Where is our Shehem, our Jericho--where?! Have we forgotten them?! And all that lies beyond the Jordan--each and every clod of earth, every region, hill, valley, every plot of land, that is part of the Land of Israel--have we the right to give up even one grain of the Land of God?! On that night, nineteen years ago, during those hours, as I sat trembling in every limb of my body, wounded, cut, torn to pieces --I could not then rejoice."

R. Zvi Yehuda Kook [1891-1982. Son of R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook]. Speech given three weeks before the Six Day War. Cited in various places, including Yossi Klein Halevi, *Like Dreamers*, 2013.

15) The whole of this country is ours. It belongs absolutely to all of us and it cannot be given over to others ... It is the inheritance of our father Abraham, "To thy seed will I give this land" (Exodus 12,7). Therefore, there can once and for all be no possible doubt that there



are no Arab territories and Arab lands here, only Jewish lands, the eternal inheritance of our forefathers, on which others came and built without our permission or presence. And we never left or were separated from the inheritance of our forefathers, we everlastingly continued ... to protest against their cruel and artificial control of the land. So we are commanded to liberate our lands and never to relinquish them. This whole land, according to all the Biblical borders, belongs to and comes under the rule of the people of Israel.

Ibid, *Lenetivot Yisrael*, 1967.

16) Electricity is a power we all know exists, and we all know the effect it has, but all the same it cannot be seen. Similarly, holiness has a reality of its own. It may not be seen or felt but it affects objects, places and time. In fact, the root of all existence is holiness...

Rabbi Zalman Baruch Melamed , "The Holiness of the Land of Israel."

17) Merkaz Harav followers... emphasizing two key concepts: the holiness of the Land of Israel and the holiness of the State of Israel. According to the junior Kook, the Land of Israel – comprised of land within the 1948 borders, the territories acquired in 1967, and even Transjordan – is one unit, a complete organic entity imbued with its own will and holiness. This entity is connected and united with the entire Jewish people- present, past, and future – so that the people and the land are in complete oneness. Therefore no one has a right to give away a part of the land.

Prof. Motti Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Israeli Territorial Compromises*, 2012

18) For religious thinkers such as Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, the Zionist revolution was destined to release spiritual energies that had been repressed by the unnatural condition of galut (exile). Rabbi Kook looked forward to the emergence of a new Jewish prototype as a result of the secular, often atheistic, Zionist enterprise...The expansion of Israeli control over most of the Promised Land was seen as confirmation that the establishment of the messianic kingdom was in the process of being realized. There was a rush to set up rudimentary settlements in a large number of places on the assumption that the Ingathering of the Exiles would shortly swamp Israel.

As with all previous messianic expectations, reality proved otherwise; and yet the dominant religious ideological perspective of religious Zionism today is still Rabbi Kook's messianic theology. The vitality of religious youth movements is still nurtured by teachings from the Kook tradition. How this religious community might respond to a peace settlement or another unilateral disengagement that demands territorial compromise is an acute political issue whose outcome many are hesitant and fearful to predict. Any political compromise regarding the biblical map of Israel and, by implication, the messianic redemptive destiny of Israel will undermine the legitimacy of the existing government.

Rabbi David Hartman, "The Significance of Israel for the Future of Judaism." 07.12.2008

19) The Gush Emunim messianic paradigm... was profoundly challenged by the Oslo process, and the surge of interest in the mount...The final, crushing blow to the Kook-based messianic approach was probably delivered by the Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, in 2005, and the destruction of the Gush Katif settlements there. The Gush Emunim narrative, which talks



about unbroken redemption and the impossibility of retreat, encountered an existential crisis...Many religious Zionists are thus turning toward the [Temple] mount in place of the belief in step-by-step progress... State consciousness is abandoned, along with the patience needed for graduated progress toward redemption. In their place come partisan messianism and irreverent efforts to hasten the messianic era – for apocalypse now.

Dr. Tomer Persico, "Why Rebuilding the Temple Would Be the End of Judaism as We Know it." *Ha'Aretz*, November 13, 2014.

The Israel of Fantasy vs. Reality

20) Our Rabbis taught: If he desires to go up [to Israel] and his wife refuses she must be pressed to go up; and if [she does] not [consent] she may be divorced without a *ketubah*. If she desires to go up and he refuses, he must be pressured; if [he does] not [consent] he must divorce her and pay her *ketubah*.

Talmud, *Ketubot* 110b.

"This law does not apply in our time [Middle Ages], because of the danger of the journey."

Tosafot (ad loc)

21) Jews did not visit Palestine in large numbers, until Saladin finally regained the Holy City for Mohammedan rule, towards the end of the twelfth century. From that time pilgrimages of Jews became more frequent; but the real influx of Jews into Palestine dates from 1492, when many of the Spanish exiles settled there...Sefardic population. It may be said that in the Middle Ages the journey to Palestine was fraught with so much danger that it was gallantry that induced men to go mostly without their wives.

Israel Abrahams [England, 1858-1925] *The Book of Delight and Other Papers*, 1911

22) [In the Middle Ages] only a few Jews visited the country. For most of the people, the land of Israel became an imagined place that was the focus of emotion, speculation and ritual. Even the memories of the land from the time the nation dwelt there underwent mythologization and became displaced by messianic and apocalyptic hopes and dreams.

Professor Eliezer Schweid [Philosophy, Hebrew University], "The Land of Israel" in *Contemporary Jewish Religious Thought*, 1986

23) A man is safer in a pit filled with scorpions and snakes in the Land of Israel, than in the opulent palaces of a foreign land; safer, in apparent physical danger in the Land of Israel, than in circumstances which appear physically secure outside the Land.

Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin [1749-1821], comments on the Babylonian Talmud, *Masechet Sanhedrin* 6, on the matter of Joseph being thrown into the pit.

24) In the Diaspora, whoever increases its settlement (by establishing a home, business, etc) adds to the destruction of the worship of G-d. But in the Land of Israel this same work is considered a mitzvah since it settles the land.



Rabbi Moses Sofer, Germany/Pressburg; [1762- 1839], *Chatam Sofer* on the Babylonian Talmud, Masechet *Sukka* 36a and *Yoreh Deah*.

25) It seems to me, in our present peaceful existence outside the Land of Israel, that we have found another Eretz Yisrael and Jerusalem; this to me, is the greatest, deepest and most obvious and direct cause of all the awesome, frightening monstrous, unimaginable destruction that we have experienced in the Diaspora.

Rabbi Yaacov Emden [Germany; 1697-1776] (The *Ya'avetz*) in his *Siddur Beit Yaacov*

26) If a Jew will forget his origin and true identity and consider himself a full-fledged citizen of the country of his exile... if he thinks that Berlin is Jerusalem...then a raging storm will uproot him by his trunk... the tempest will arise and spread its roaring waves, and swallow, and destroy and spread forth without pity."

Rabbi Meir Simcha HaCohen [Lithuania/Poland/Latvia; 1843-1926] *Meschech Chochma*

[Note: None of the above rabbis ever settled in or even visited Israel]

27) In 1,800 years--from the destruction of the Second Temple until the birth of Zionism--- the Jewish people did not make one serious or significant effort to return to *Eretz Yisrael* and restore its lost independence. The people, with the resourcefulness, flexibility, and cunning to reach almost every point on earth--from the Atlas Mountains to the Indian Desert, from Tierra del Fuego to the Serbian steppes--did not make one real effort to come back and settle in *Eretz Yisrael*. Further, the Jews settled in masses in every country around the Mediterranean basin, except *Eretz Yisrael*. In their wanderings the Jews circled around and about the Land, drawn to it yet fearing it...

When such a fundamental and difficult question as this ambivalence [about *aliyah*] is examined, what emerges is behavior of a palpably neurotic nature. The nation hates the *golah* [exile] and dreams of *Eretz Yisrael*...On the other hand, throughout its historical activity it has been preoccupied with the one problem of how to survive in the *golah*, how to go on maintaining that hated existence. Suppose, for example, that we had an unmarried friend that hated and suffered from his unmarried status, proclaimed that he believed in family life, and avidly sought it...Suppose that despite this he spoiled--almost intentionally--all possibilities of marriage, that every time we arranged a union between him and any woman, he did everything to get out of it, not because he did not like the woman or was incapable of love, but out of fear of marriage, in which he so fervently believed. Would it not be our duty to this friend to try to find out, by therapeutic means, the underlying motives for his profound neurotic conflict? The Jewish people are in need of just such therapy.

A.B. Yehoshua [Israeli novelist], "Exile as a Neurotic Solution" in *Diaspora: Exile and the Contemporary Jewish Condition*, 1986

Searching for the Truth, or the Failure of the Sign

28) [Nathan Zuckerman at the Kotel]: "Rock is just right, I thought : what on earth could be less responsive. Even the cloud drifting overhead...appeared less indifferent to our encompassed and uncertain existence."



Philip Roth, *The Counterlife*, 1985

29) The absolute invisibility of the origin of the visible, the unattainment of presence or beingness in any form...gives rise to a structure of replacements such that all presences will be supplements substituted for the absent origin."

Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy" in *Dissemination*, 1981

30) Western Philosophy.... has also been in a broader sense, 'logocentric', committed to a belief in some ultimate 'word', presence, essence, truth or reality which will act as the foundation for all our thought, language and experience. It has yearned for the sign which will give meaning to all others, – 'the transcendental signifier' – and for the anchoring, unquestioning meaning to which all our signs can be seen to point (the transcendental signified').

Professor Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*, 1996

31) God's palpable presence and direct, natural involvement in daily life—and I emphasize both "direct" and "daily"—, His immediate responsibility for everyday events, *was* a fact of life in the East European *shtetl*, so late as several generations ago....The world to which the uprooted came, and in which their children were raised, was that of modern science, which had reduced nature to "an irreversible series of equations," to an immutable nexus of cause and effect, which suffices on its own to explain the workings of the world. I think it safe to say that the perception of God as a *daily, natural* force is no longer present to a significant degree in any sector of modern Jewry, even the most religious. Indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that individual Divine Providence, though passionately believed as a theological principle—and I do not for a moment question the depth of that conviction—is no longer experienced as a simple reality. With the shrinkage of God's palpable hand in human affairs has come a marked loss of His immediate presence, with its primal fear and nurturing comfort. With this distancing, the religious world has been irrevocably separated from the spirituality of its fathers, indeed, from the religious mood of intimate anthropomorphism that had cut across all the religious divides of the Old World. It is this rupture in the traditional religious sensibilities that underlies much of the transformation of contemporary Orthodoxy. Zealous to continue traditional Judaism unimpaired, religious Jews seek to ground their new emerging spirituality less on a now unattainable intimacy with Him, than on an intimacy with His Will, avidly eliciting Its intricate demands and saturating their daily lives with Its exactions. Having lost the touch of His presence, they seek now solace in the pressure of His yoke.

Dr. Chaim Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy." *Tradition*, Vol. 28, No. 4 (Summer 1994)

32) Our Rabbis taught: One must always live in the Land of Israel, even in a town of mostly idolaters; and let no one live outside the Land, even in a town of mostly Israelites. For whoever lives in the Land of Israel is as one who has a God, and whoever lives outside the Land is as one who has no God.

Babylonian Talmud, *Masechet Ketubot*, 110B