Holiness and Responsibility

English as well as French differentiates the term holy from the term sacred – in fact, Levinas' book "Du sacré au saint" is translated as "From the Sacred to the Holy". This is illustrative of the extent to which the meanings of the two words differ. God is called "The Holy One Blessed be He", but we would find it peculiar to refer to Him as "The Sacred One". By contrast, when referring to places or objects, both terms can be used. Jerusalem, the Temple and the objects used for Temple service are thus both holy and sacred. In Hebrew, however, there is only one word, *kadosh*, to translate both holy and sacred. God, Jerusalem, the Temple and its utensils, the animals sacrificed there are all *kadosh.*

This raises a number of questions which I will attempt to answer in this talk. Can we assign a meaning to *kadosh* that covers such a disparate set of instances? Furthermore it is troubling that places, buildings, and objects are termed sacred. Isn't it somewhat improper to link sacredness to spaces or material things? Isn't this a slippery slope towards idolatry? Worse, in history, the quest for the sacred flirts with perversions of all types and the protection of what is considered sacred has been used to justify all types of horrors. Along the path to the sacred, one finds violence at its most paroxysmal. If this is the final outcome, wouldn't it be better to abandon the notion of the sacred itself, and exclude it from our frame of thought?

This problem was behind the Biblical prohibition to use a 'sword' to build the tabernacle:

> **1 Exodus 20-21,22**
> v.21 An altar of earth you shall build for Me, and shall sacrifice thereon your burnt-offerings, and your peace-offerings, […]
> v. 22 And if you build a stone altar for me, you shall not build it out of cut stones; for if you lift up your sword upon it, you will have profaned it.

The Talmud extends this prohibition to all iron objects and Rashi comments on the verses from Exodus as follows:

> **Rashi:** The Altar was created to lengthen man's days and to make peace between Israel and Hashem (by making it possible to atone for faults) whereas iron (used for wars) was created to shorten man's days, to cut and destroy.

What we need to retain here as a starting point for Jewish tradition is that there is an inherent opposition between violence and the sacred. King David, a man of war, was not permitted to complete the building of the Temple. Nowhere is there a description of a ceremony for a military victory.

Outline of this talk

Before going into detail, this is how my talk is structured. My first task will be to provide a definition of the word *kadosh*, as it was used in the Bible according to the Talmudic interpretation. This is the meaning I will assign to the notion of holy. This will enable me to describe holiness as a 3-storey structure; or, to put it another way, holiness can be seen as taking on three increasingly more elevated forms:

1. The first floor of the building is intended for occupancy by all the people of Israel, and to a large extent by all human beings. This is the form of holiness covered by the laws of the Torah at their broadest.
2. The second floor is a restricted space which is guarded vigilantly, and which is set aside for well -defined functions and is regulated by specific laws. It involves everything that is connected to the Temple. This is the form of holiness which can also be validly termed sacred and which is particularly liable to perversion.
3. The third floor is the highest degree of holiness - which is probably a Talmudic specialty. It can be defined as a purely ethical responsibility for the Other, but is nonetheless responsibility which does not exempt the Other from his own responsibility.

I. The General meaning of Holiness

To bring out the common meaning of the various aspects of holiness, two paradigmatic examples are most suitable.
Let's take the first occurrence of holiness in the Bible. It appears as early as Genesis, in the second chapter, in the following verse:

> **2 Genesis 2-3** God blessed the seventh day, and He declared it to be *holy*, for it was on this day that God ceased from all the work that He had created and organized.

What makes the Sabbath holy? One definition which is often put forward for the notion of holiness is 'separation'. Holiness is compared and contrasted with the unconsecrated and is subjected to specific proscriptions which serve to differentiate it. The Sabbath is holy because it is different from all the other days of the week, which are considered 'profane.'
However, this remains a formal definition. Separation is a logical category and assigns no real content to the holiness of the Sabbath. In particular, it is difficult to understand why, due to the holiness of the Sabbath, Jewish law forbids any work to be done, in the sense of a transformation of the world. Taken to the extreme, any distinctive trait could differentiate the Sabbath from the other days of the week. Literally, the Torah says that observing the Sabbath is a sign of the creation of the world. But it involves more than simply rekindling awareness of a theological principle through a set of symbolic gestures. The Sabbath is a form of behavior, a way of being where one acknowledges the fact of having been created. In other words, it

implements the fact that the individual is not the author of his existence or his strengths.

'profane' time is the time when man as a being acts autonomously. Conquest and domination of Nature, unlimited expansion of wealth and power are its prime features. *"Fill the earth and master it"* says Genesis, a sentence which should be interpreted as the mission of humanity. Armed with his intellect, man shapes the world to his liking, transforms stones into mansions, trees into furniture, raw grain into gourmet dishes and shimmering fabrics.

The holiness of the Sabbath signifies a periodic halt to this imperialism. This holiness does not take place in a kind of mystical ecstasy but rather as a temporary renunciation of the power to change the world.

Here is the second example. Chapter 19 of Leviticus begins with the following verses:

> **3 Leviticus, chapter 19**
> v. 1. HaShem spoke to Moses, telling him :
> v. 2. Speak to the entire community of the children of Israel and say to them: « You must be holy, since I am holy, I who is HaShem your God ».

What does this obligation to be holy mean? Let's see how Rashi, the great Torah commentator explains this. Rashi points out that the commandment to be holy comes after a chapter where various sexual prohibitions, in particular incest, are described, and mentions other similar contexts where the notion of holiness also appears. Rashi concludes that:

> **Rachi** Be holy means: observe the sexual prohibitions. Wherever you find a restriction on sexuality, you will find the notion of holiness.

Rashi deliberately avoids all mystical ideas, any idea of religious communion with the divine, mortification, or ecstasy. Holiness is not related to the elevation achieved by a handful of elite souls through meditation or religious exaltation. It is an ethical notion which applies to the community as a whole. It is defined here simply by a certain number of restrictions on sexual freedom, a limitation on the spontaneous manifestation of desires or drives.

In the case of the Sabbath, holiness means a restriction on the individual's strength which is derived from the implementation of one's intellectual power. Here it refers to a restriction on the spontaneous expression of vital energies.

These two facets of holiness that we have just seen can be subsumed under a single concept.. To do so, let's give the verb **to be** its full meaning, not just as an auxiliary verb linking subject and object. **To be** in this sense means perseverance in one's being, growth and expansion of power and dominance, freedom to express vital energies, desires and drives, and the pursuit of personal interests. In a nutshell, it

refers to the expansion of the ego in its different modalities, both through use of the mind as well as through the use of physical and biological forces and strength.

Holiness, in all of its variants in Jewish tradition, signifies some kind of restriction on this expansion. To use a term frequently employed by Levinas in a philosophical context, holiness signifies a boundary or a suspension of the 'play of being' ,or, in Spinoza's terms, the 'conatus essendi'.

Thus, all the commandments in the Torah – the positive as well as the negative ones- can be seen as related to the notion of holiness and it is easy to understand why the blessing said for some of these commandments makes reference to holiness:

> **4** Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe who has *sanctified us* with His commandments and commanded us so and so …

Where does the importance ascribed to holiness come from? In the final analysis is it inspired by some ideal of human perfection found in one philosophical system or another? One could, for example, think of philosophies that encourage a meditative life, or the Aristotelian concept of moderation in behavior, or self-control as suggested by the Stoics, etc.

You, who are Levinas scholars, will not be surprised if I tell you that the importance ascribed to holiness in Judaism comes from another source. Whether directly or in a veiled manner, the point of departure is the relationship to the Other, as was clearly pointed out to a non-Jew who came to Hillel's court to be accepted as a Jew but however insisted on a strange precondition:

> **5 Shabbat 31a**: A non-Jew came before Hillel and told him: accept me as a Jew on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot. Hillel accepted him and then said: that which is hateful to you do not do to your fellow. This is the entire Torah. The rest is but the elaboration of this central point. Now go and learn.

In the final analysis, what motivates all the commandments in the Torah is a specific ethical approach. It involves an ethical system which is not defined at the outset as an ideal of human perfection but rather as a challenge to the spontaneity of my freedom that initiates in the encounter with the Other. I quote Levinas:

> **6 Totality and Infinity, p. 84**
> It is the welcoming of the Other, the commencement of moral conscience which calls my freedom into question […]. Morality begins when freedom, instead of being self-justified, recognizes itself as arbitrary and violent.

I have shown earlier that holiness implies a certain restriction on the 'play of being'. We can now see that what motivates, underlies, or constitutes the lifeline of this system of restrictions is ethics, which, by definition is the challenge by the Other to unbridled freedom; in other words, precisely a bound on the 'play of being'.

Thus holiness, in its Talmudic meaning, is nothing other than a mode of conduct specifically adapted to the fulfillment of ethics. Holiness can be compared to a river whose headwaters are in ethics and then flows to engulf human conduct as a whole. This is basically what Levinas teaches us:

> **7 Difficile Liberté, p. 36**: The fact that relationship to the divine crosses the relationship between men and coincides with social justice characterizes the entire spirit of the Jewish Bible. Moses and the prophets were not concerned about the immortality of the soul; they were concerned about the poor man, the widow, the orphan and the stranger.

And also:

> **8 Difficile Liberté, p. 34**: The Jewish commandments constitute the strict discipline that is oriented towards this justice. Only someone who was able to impose a rule on his own nature can recognize the face of the Other. At no time do these commandments take on the value of a sacrament.

II. The Sacred

I now take the elevator to the second floor of the holiness building. Here we find holiness limited to a restricted space guarded by specially designated individuals employed to carry out specific actions. This type of holiness is correctly termed 'sacred'. Here is a short description.

The prime locus of the sacred is the Temple - the Temple of Jerusalem - although certain features of the sacred apply to Jerusalem as a whole. The Temple rituals are entrusted to the Cohanim, the 'priests' who descended from Aaron, Moses' brother. The Cohanim must observe a complex set of laws above and beyond those that apply to the Jewish people in general. The objects used in the Temple service are sacred and cannot be used for other purposes. The animal or plant offerings intended for sacrifices are first 'consecrated' and used exclusively for this purpose. In instances when the sacrifices must be eaten, and this must be done within the confines of Jerusalem, and at times inside the Temple walls itself.

Judaism is clearly wary of the multitude of ways the sacred can be perverted: superstitions of all types, justification of extreme forms of immorality, varieties of ecstasy that negate human reason and will, aggravated asceticism, and violent cults that can lead to murder. It comes as no surprise that Jewish tradition forbids any sacrifice outside the walls of the Temple. As a result, since the destruction of the Temple, sacrifices have vanished completely from Jewish life.
This mistrust appears frequently and literally in the Biblical texts themselves. For example, in the commandment to revere the Temple, the Torah states:

> **9 Leviticus 19.**
> v. 30. You shall observe My Sabbaths and shall revere My Temple. I am HaShem.

v. 31. Do not turn to mediums, nor seek out oracles, so as to defile yourselves through them. I am HaShem your God.

The Talmud is even stricter, and refuses to allow the phrase 'revere my Temple' to be taken literally. In Tractate Yevamoth, it is stated:

10 Yevamoth 6a-b:
Just as with regard to the Sabbath, you do not revere the Sabbath itself but the One who commanded regarding the Sabbath, so too with regard to the Temple, you do not revere the Temple itself [for example by bowing down towards it] but only the One who commanded regarding the Temple.
[Hence « to revere the Temple » means only to behave respectfully in it] : One may not enter the Temple mount with his staff, with his shoes, with his money belt, with the dust that is upon his feet and a fortiori spitting is prohibited there.

Correct conduct is required in the sacred space, but it has no magical properties, and nothing that elicits fear and trembling. Similarly, Talmudic tradition rejects the mystical and/or ascetic forms that the sacred has taken in most if not all other religions.
However, despite the risks of perversion, as far as possible, Judaism preserved its Temple and its rituals, and the hope that these rituals might one day be restored has never ceased to be present in Jewish life in exile. We thus need to bring out its positive meaning.
The sacred space is one that can be termed extra-territorial. It escapes the economic order. The Temple is not a market, a place where commercial transactions take place: one does not come to the Temple with one's wallet. The presence of Temple merchants is not only inappropriate; it is contrary to the very nature of the space itself.

What accounts for the preservation of this separate sacred space? The main reason why this is so difficult to comprehend is related to the notion of sacrifice that today is foreign to us. We no longer make sacrifices, such that we do not have a grasp of what these experiences meant. However, there is one point which sheds a great deal of light on them: nearly all the sacrifices mentioned in the Bible are intended either as atonement for a fault, or to be consumed during a festival.

In the first case, even though the specifics of the rituals escape us, it is nevertheless obvious that the purpose of the sacrifice is ethical.[1] Furthermore, the Talmud, which was written long after the destruction of the Temple at a time when sacrifices were only a distant memory, uses texts dealing with sacrifices as the basis for particularly subtle analyses of the notion of fault.
In the second case as well, that of festivals, an ethical meaning is tightly associated with that of sacrifice. During festivals, the entire Jewish people gathered together in Jerusalem for a period of celebration whose key moment was the partaking of

[1] According to certain anthropologists, in particular Marcel Mauss, this was a distinguishing trait of Jewish sacrifices in Antiquity. Sacrifices by other peoples were offered in exchange for boons from their divinity.

sacrifices during family meals. The Torah repeatedly stresses the absolute obligation to invite people without families or those on the fringes of society to these meals.

> **11 Deuteronomy, chapter 16.**
> v. 11. You shall rejoice before HaShem, your God, you, and your son, and your daughter, and your man-servant and your maid-servant, and the Levite that is within your gates, and the stranger, and the orphan, and the widow among you, in the place which HaShem your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there.
> v. 12. You must remember that you were a bondsman in Egypt, and thus carefully keep these rules.

The sacred space is a place, where for a brief moment social differences are annulled and everyone partakes in the collective joy. The sacred space thus has a dual role: on the one hand, atonement for faults, and on the other the welcome of individuals from the fringes of society. Life in the sacred space is entirely composed of ethical concerns and fraternity.
Thus the sacred space depicted in the Bible and the Talmud can perhaps be described as utopian. This unique space is deliberately designed to be cut off from daily life, removed from production, competition, and any 'struggle for existence' – in short, from the 'play of being'. In this sense the sacred space is already imbued with the general notion of holiness that I discussed earlier. But the role of the sacred space is the fulfillment of an accentuated holiness, a holiness made salient. Whereas in daily life holiness is cast as mere restrictions and a framework imposed on the 'play of being', here holiness constitutes the main purpose of this sacred space. In other words, the sacred space can be defined as a purely ethical space; hence its utopianism.

What remained of all this when the Temple was destroyed? The Talmud provides the answer to this question.

> **12 Berakhot, 54b-55**a
> One who spends a long time at his table prolongs his days and his years. Why ? Because perhaps a poor person will come and he will give food to him. Indeed it is written (Ezekiel, 41-22) : *The Altar was of wood, three cubits tall […]*, and it is written further : *This is the Table that is before HaShem*. The verse began by the Altar and ended by the Table ! Both Rabbi Yohanan and Rabbi Elazar said : « All the time that the Temple was standing, the Altar would atone for Israel. Now man’s table atones for him ».

The table is the place *par excellence* for the manifestation of the 'play of being'. The Table is the locus of sustenance, enjoyment, entrenchment in existence of the 'perseverance of being'. The Talmud, with a touch of humor, reverses this perspective. Whoever stays at the table deserves to have long life. Why? Not for dietary reasons but because a poor man might join him. The place of personal gratification becomes

the place of openness to others. The sacrificial altar disappears but the table where the poor man is welcomed can replace it.

Thus overall, the sacred is similar to Aesop's tongue[2] which is said to be the best and the worst of things. The sacred can pave the way to mystifications, superstitions, immorality, violence and war. Beware of the sacred. This is what Levinas taught continuously from the beginning to the end of his philosophical itinerary. The sacred has virtually disappeared from Jewish life and given current circumstances there may no real reasons to wish it were otherwise.

However life in the sacred space can be seen from a different perspective exempt of all myth and magic. It can be seen as a privileged moment, a precious instant where holiness, ethics infuse life itself. Doctors say that physical exercise is good for the health. Life in the sacred space is nothing other than a moment of intense ethical exercise. Today we no longer exercise in this way, but as the Talmud points out, there is much to be gained from its theoretical study.

III. Holiness as Responsibility for the Other

I will take the elevator once again to the third floor. Here we find various types of people whose common feature is to be, in one way or another, responsible for other people's faults. It is here that we encounter what constitutes the ultimate form of holiness, which, for the Talmud is literally defined as the 'more-than-perfect'. The analysis that leads to this conclusion can be found in the page from Tractate Shabbat that was handed out. It starts by dealing with a dispute opposing R. Elazar, one of the greatest Tannaim to all his other colleagues.

> **13 Mishna Shabbat 54b**
> The cow of Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah[3] used to go out [on the Sabbath] with a strap between her horns without the consent of the other Sages.

What is the passage about? There are 39 forms of prohibited work on the Sabbath. One of them is the transfer of objects from a private domain to a public domain or from one place to another within a public domain. This prohibition extends to animals as well. The Sages considered that a strap between a cow's horns was enough to constitute a burden, whereas R. Elazar simply saw it as adornment. The futility of this

[2] Xanthus, pleased with laughter of his guests invited them to dine with him the next day. And asked Aesop, since he was set on contradictions, to prepare the feast of the worst. "We shall see what that shall be." Again all the guests were served were dishes of tongues. Aesop explained to the angry Xanthus that, "Was it not an evil tongue that caused a break with your family? Was it not a soft tongue that caused that healed breach? The tongue is at once the best and the worst entertainment." http://www.duboislc.net/read/Aesop/Aesop.html

[3] R. Elazar was one of the most important tannaim, and was even at one point the head of the Sanhedrin.

type of dispute among the greatest Talmudic authorities may seem astonishing. Were they attempting to teach us that even in the case of an animal, no exploitation can be tolerated?
The Gemara which comments on this text asks how the Mishna could talk about 'the' cow of R. Elazar since he was extremely wealthy:

> **14 Gemara 54b-55a**
> **1)** But did Rabbi Elazar only have one cow? But Rav said: Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah used to tithe twelve thousand calves from his herd every year.[4]

This is the response:

> **2)** It is taught in a baraita: It was not 'his' cow but that of a female neighbor of his; however because he did not admonish her, it was called 'his' cow.

It is easy to imagine how busy Rabbi Elazar was, since he not only devoted much of his time to studying, teaching and his duties as a member of the Sanhedrin but also had to oversee his immense fortune. The Gemara nevertheless claims that he remained personally responsible for the behavior of the least of his neighbors. Rabbi Elazar should have intervened and doubtless his neighbor would have followed the instructions of such a great authority.

The Gemara then extends this principle to various modes of social responsibility:

> **3)** Rav, Rabbi Hanina, Rabbi Yohanan et Rav Haviva taught: whoever has the ability to admonish the members of his household but does not do so is accountable for [the transgressions of] the members of his household,
> similarly, one who can admonish the people of his town is accountable for the people of his town, one who can admonish the entire population[5], is accountable for the entire population.

Responsibility for the faults of others extends beyond mere interpersonal relationships. Whoever has actual authority is responsible, in terms of the extent of his authority, for the behavior of all considered as a whole under his tutelage. At each level of authority, there is a specific type of responsibility for the group of people involved. This is because in each case, the relationships between members of the group or relationships between subgroups must be taken into account.

[4] This refers to the law of animal tithe, which requires an annual separation of one-tenth of the newborn animals for sacrifice.
[5] Such as the king or the head of the nation.

Responsibility of the "Perfect Righteous"

Up to now, the different types of responsibility for others mentioned in the Talmud have been associated with a function or actual authority. The next part of the text introduces the idea of responsibility which is not bound by any political or social context. This is the responsibility of the ' perfect' righteous as a ' perfect' righteous, as though the fact of being perfect was not enough in itself. As though having reached the pinnacle of individual perfection, loomed a gaping chasm of responsibilities for others which one can never be sure to have fulfilled. This is thus a very special type of responsibility, a purely ethical responsibility.

The Biblical episode the Gemara then expounds upon took place during one of Ezekiel's visions. The passage describes Ezekiel's vision of angels of destruction coming to Jerusalem and God commanding them to wreak havoc among the people.

> **4)** Rabbi Aha, the son of Rabbi Hanina said : A good decree never issued from the mouth of the Holy One, Blessed is He, and then He retracted it for bad, except in this matter [of failing to rebuke] as it is written :
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> > v. 4. Hashem said to the angel : Pass through the city, through Jerusalem and mark the letter « tav » on the forehead of the [righteous] people who sigh and moan over all the abominations that are done in its midst.
> > v. 5. And to the others angels He said in my hearing: Pass through the city after him, and smite; let not your eye spare, neither have pity;
> > v. 6. slay utterly the old man, the young man and the maiden, and little children and women; but don’t come near any man upon whom is the mark;
>
> [This means that] the Holy One, Blessed is He, said to the angel Gabriel : Go and mark a *tav* of ink on the foreheads of the righteous, so that the angels of destruction [that I wish to send upon the city] shall have no power upon them and on the foreheads of the wicked set a *tav* of blood.

This is the 'good decree' mentioned by Rabbi Aha at the beginning of his argument. A plague will strike Jerusalem whose inhabitants have committed moral abominations. Luckily the righteous who resisted and whose conduct has been continuously blameless in the midst of this widespread depravity are identified and escape the massacre.

But R. Aha does not stop there. He explains that a heated debate took place between God and his attribute of Justice that was not at all happy with the decree. This is how the passage continues:

> **5)** The Attribute of Justice asked the Holy One, Blessed be He : Master of the Universe, what is the difference between these and these ?

God answered : these are « completely righteous » and these are « completely wicked ».
The Justice argued : Master of the Universe, the righteous had the possibility to protest against [the wicked] and they did not protest.
God replied : it is revealed and known to Me that if they had protested against the wicked, the latter would not have accepted any reproof from them.
The Justice once more argued : Master of the Universe, if it is revealed before You, is it revealed to the righteous ?

This argument by the Attribute of Justice 'persuaded' God to rescind his decision to spare the righteous. R. Aha then shows how this change can be understood by a non literal reading of the end of the 6th verse:

6) Then God changed his mind and it is what is written:
v. 6. slay utterly the old man, the young man and the maiden, and little children and women; but come not near any man upon whom is the mark;
which is followed and ends with:
and begin with My Temple ; and they began with the elders who were before the House.
Rav Yosef taught : Do not read « My Temple[6] » but « My sanctified ones[7] ». These are people who observed the entire Torah from *aleph* to *tav*.

First of all, a few comments on this teaching of Rav Yosef. As a general rule, it should be pointed out that all the interpretations of the Biblical text found in the Talmud depart from the literal meaning. Levinas was taught this principle by his Talmudic master, Mr. Shushani. The Talmud manipulates the literal meaning to present deeper insights. Let us see how this works here. What is the literal meaning?

Why should the plague begin by striking the elders around the Temple? Commentators explain that these were people who were burning incense to honor idols within a chamber in the Temple, an incident that is mentioned in the preceding chapter of Ezekiel. This is the greatest of all abominations and thus it is quite right that they should be the first people struck down. Rav. Yosef's interpretation practically turns the literal interpretation on its head by replacing the phrase 'my Temple' [miqdashi] by the phrase 'my sanctified', [mequdachai] which only differs in Hebrew from the phrase 'my Temple' by additional vowels. These elders are in fact the perfect righteous, holy individuals who observe the commandments of the Torah in their entirety. Their only fault is not to have reacted to the faults of those of their generation, and to have maintained an attitude of passive desolation. Nevertheless the angels of destruction begin with them.

[6] miqdashi.
[7] mequdashai.

The discussion the Talmud imagines between God and his attribute of justice shows that the 'being righteous' can be interpreted in two ways. The first is an ideal of individual perfection, the complete fulfillment of what the Torah requires. To achieve this ideal, each individual is endowed with complete freedom and full responsibility. This freedom and this responsibility entail *a contrario* the eventuality of evil. The corollary is that these individuals, isolated in their perfection, can only sigh and lament at the sight of the depravity of the world around them. This perspective corresponds to a certain classic conception of moral freedom. In particular it adheres to a large extent to the Kantian model.

This however does not satisfy the Talmud. The Talmud considers that true justice has not been rendered. The perfection of the righteous, precisely the holiness of the righteous, invests them with additional responsibility, a responsibility for other's faults. This responsibility is not associated with a form of power, as in the examples above. It is purely ethical, and derives directly from perfection, the holiness of the righteous individual. Thus it behooves the 'perfect righteous' to be more than perfect. Or, to use Levinas' phraseology: "the more perfect I am, the more responsible I am" beyond any set limit.

For Kant, holiness is a feature of will: will is holy when it is completely compliant with moral laws without external constraints or even the internal constraint of duty. But at no time does Kant link holiness with responsibility for the shortcomings of others. The Talmud however requires this of anyone it deems holy.

After some hesitations, the Holy One Blessed be He, who never fails to fulfill his promises of beneficence, reverses his decision. Finally, and in an initially paradoxical move, it is the 'perfect righteous' who deserves to be punished first. Metaphorically speaking, God, after experiencing a Kantian moment, became Levinasian.

Conclusion

In closing, I will summarize the main points I have raised by drawing parallels with Levinas' intellectual itinerary.

Holiness in all the forms in which it appears in Jewish tradition implies a restriction, a suspension or an overriding to different extents of the 'play of being'. We will see that already the titles of Levinas's two major philosophical works make reference to this, using his own terminology.

The first work, **Totality and Infinity**, opposes 'totality' which is nothing other than a word to designate the 'play of being' and 'infinity' which transcends it, which is external to it, as is seen in the subtitle of the book "An essay on exteriority". In this work, the human subject, in his initial structure, is characterized as an egotistical psyche, enjoyment of life, unbridled spontaneity, domination over material things, expansion, freedom convinced of its legitimacy. The encounter with the Other, the 'face' of the Other, says Levinas, challenges the legitimacy of this enjoyment and this imperialism. It is the source of ethical conscience, prohibitions and obligations to

others. This description is closely linked to the notion of holiness as described on the first floor of its building. Holiness is a restriction on the 'play of being' which derives first of all from ethics and extends to human conduct as a whole.

On the second floor of the building, holiness took the form of the sacred and under this label applies to material things, spaces, objects and animals. Judaism in general and the Talmud in particular have the greatest distrust for this type of holiness which in the history of humanity has always degenerated into superstition, pathological behavior, immorality, violence and war.
For his part Levinas never ceased throughout his works to condemn perversities associated with the sacred. The following sentence summarizes his stance in emblematic fashion:

> **16 Totality and Infinity**: "Everything that cannot be connected to an interpersonal relationship represents not the superior form but the forever primitive form of religion." (p.79)

However Jewish tradition recognizes the possibility of preserving the sacred provided that it is strictly regulated and is only allocated a restricted space, that of the Temple of Jerusalem. Life in the sacred space is a privileged moment, a unique moment where holiness and ethics merge with life itself. Expiation for faults, fraternity, and celebration where social disparities are annulled are its hallmarks.

The third floor of the building of holiness corresponds closely with Levinas' second major work. This can already be seen from the title, which is **Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence** where the term 'essence' refers precisely to the 'play of being'. Furthermore, after the publication of the book Levinas often said that from now on he would prefer the term holiness to that of ethics.

In **Totality and Infinity** Levinas describes an ego which is initially confined within its self in its joy of living and which is challenged by the encounter with the face of the Other. In **Otherwise than Being,** going so far as the ultimate 'secret of subjectivity', Levinas shows that the human subject is initially structured as responsibility for the Other, even before any encounter. This responsibility extends to responsibility for the faults of other such that Levinas ultimately views the subject as living on the third floor of the building of holiness. Commenting in a *Talmudic Reading* the exegesis of Rav Joseph which is so much in tune with its own thought, Levinas writes and this will conclude my talk :

> **16 Nine Talmudic Readings p. 186, 189**
> The righteous are responsible because they have not been righteous enough to make their justice spread and abolish injustice : it is the fiasco of the best which leaves the coast clear for the worst […]
> We are, in this punishment of the righteous […] quite far from the anthropology of the West, quite far from its insistance upon the *perseverance in being*, upon the famous *conatus* describing the *essence* of the man.