

Sacred Space - Jewish Texts

Exodus 3:1-5

וּמֹשֶׁה הָיָה רֹעֵה אֶת־צֹאן יִתְרוֹ חֹתֶנּוּ כִּהְיוּ מִדְיָן וַיִּנְהַג אֶת־הַצֹּאן אַחֲרֵי הַמִּדְבָּר וַיָּבֹא אֶל־הַר הָאֱלֹהִים חֹרֵבָה: וַיֵּרָא מִלְּאֲךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי בְלֶבֶת־אֵשׁ מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֵּרָא וְהִנֵּה הַסֵּנֶה בֹעֵר בְּאֵשׁ וְהַסֵּנֶה אֵינּוּ אֶכָּל: וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶסְרֶה־נָּא וְאַרְאֶה אֶת־הַמְּרֹאֶה הַגָּדֹל הַזֶּה מִדּוּעַ לֹא־יִבְעַר הַסֵּנֶה: וַיֵּרָא יְהוָה כִּי סָר לְרֵאוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֵלָיו אֱלֹהִים מִתּוֹךְ הַסֵּנֶה וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמֶר הֲנִי: וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל־תִּקְרַב הֵלֶם שְׁלֵנְעֻלֶיךָ מֵעַל רַגְלֶיךָ כִּי הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אַתָּה עוֹמֵד עָלָיו אֲדָמַת־קֹדֶשׁ הוּא:

1. And Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian; and he led the flock far away into the desert, and came to the mountain of God, to Horeb.
2. And the angel of the Eternal One appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush; and he looked, and, behold, the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.
3. And Moses said, I will now turn aside, and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.
4. And when the Eternal One saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the midst of the bush, and said, Moses, Moses. And he said, Here am I.
5. And he said, Do not come any closer; take off your shoes from your feet, for the place on which you stand is holy ground.

Exodus 40:17ff.

וַיְהִי בַחֲדָשׁ הַרְּאִשׁוֹן בַּשָּׁנָה הַשְּׁנִיית בְּאַחַד לַחֲדָשׁ הַיּוֹקֵם הַמִּשְׁכָּן: וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־אֲדָנָיו וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־קַרְשָׁיו וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־בְּרִיחָיו וַיִּקָּם אֶת־עַמּוּדָיו: וַיִּפְרֹשׂ אֶת־הָאֹהֶל עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־מַכְסֵה הָאֹהֶל עָלָיו מִלְמַעְלָה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: וַיִּקַּח וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַעֲדוֹת אֶל־הָאֲרוֹן וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־הַבְּדָיִם עַל־הָאֲרוֹן וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל־הָאֲרוֹן מִלְמַעְלָה: וַיָּבֹא אֶת־הָאֲרוֹן אֶל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת פְּרֻכַת הַמָּסָךְ וַיִּסֹּךְ עַל אֲרוֹן הָעֲדוֹת כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶ�ה: וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַשְּׁלֶחַן בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד עַל יַרְדֵּי הַמִּשְׁכָּן צִפְנָה מִחוּץ לַפְּרֻכַת: וַיַּעֲרֹךְ עָלָיו עֲרֹךְ לֶחֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶ�ה: וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־הַמִּנְחָה בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד נֹכַח הַשְּׁלֶחַן עַל יַרְדֵּי הַמִּשְׁכָּן נֹגֵבָה: וַיַּעַל הַנֵּרֹת לִפְנֵי יְהוָה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶ׈ה: וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־מִזְבַּח הָזֹהֵב בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לִפְנֵי הַפְּרֻכַת: וַיִּקְטֹר עָלָיו קֹטֹרֶת סַמִּים כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־מָסַךְ הַפֶּתַח לַמִּשְׁכָּן: וְאֵת מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה שֶׁם פֶּתַח מִשְׁכָּן אֹהֶל־מוֹעֵד וַיַּעַל עָלָיו אֶת־הָעֹלָה וְאֶת־הַמִּנְחָה כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: וַיִּשֶׂם אֶת־הַכִּיֹּר בֵּין־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּבֵין הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וַיִּתֵּן שִׁמָּה מִיַּם לְרַחֲצָה: וַרְחֲצוּ מִמֶּנּוּ מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן וּבְנָיו אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם וְאֶת־רַגְלֵיהֶם: בְּבֹאֵם אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּבְקִרְבָתְכֶם אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יִרְחֲצוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּה יְהוָה אֶת־מֹשֶׁה: וַיִּקָּם אֶת־הַחֲצֹר סָבִיב

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לְמִשְׁכַּן וְלִמְזִבְחַ וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־מָסַךְ שַׁעַר הַחֹצֵר וַיִּכַּל מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הַמִּלְאָכָה: וַיִּכַּס
הָעֵנָן אֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיְכַבֹּד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן: לֵה וְלֹא־יִכַּל מֹשֶׁה לָּבוֹא
אֶל־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד כִּי־שָׁכַן עָלָיו הָעֵנָן וַיְכַבֹּד יְהוָה מְלֵא אֶת־הַמִּשְׁכָּן: וּבִהְעֵלוֹת
הָעֵנָן מֵעַל הַמִּשְׁכָּן יִסְעוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכֹל מְסַעֵיהֶם: וְאִם־לֹא יֵעָלֶה הָעֵנָן וְלֹא
יִסְעוּ עַד־יוֹם הָעֲלֹתוֹ: לֹחַ כִּי עֵנָן יְהוָה עַל־הַמִּשְׁכָּן יוֹמָם וַיֹּאשׁ תִּהְיֶה לַיְלָה בּוֹ
לְעֵינַי כָּל־בַּיִת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּכֹל־מְסַעֵיהֶם:

17. And it came to pass in the first month in the second year, on the first day of the month, that the tabernacle was erected.
18. And Moses erected the tabernacle, and fastened his sockets, and set up its boards, and put in its bars, and erected its pillars.
19. And he spread the tent over the tabernacle, and put the covering of the tent above it; as the Eternal One commanded Moses.
20. And he took and put the Testimony into the ark, and set the poles on the ark, and put the covering above the ark;
21. And he brought the ark into the tabernacle, and set up the veil of the covering, and covered the ark of the Testimony; as the Eternal One commanded Moses.
22. And he put the table in the Tent of Meeting, upon the side of the tabernacle northward, outside the veil.
23. And he set the bread in order upon it before the Eternal One; as the Eternal One had commanded Moses.
24. And he put the lampstand in the Tent of the Meeting, opposite the table, on the south side of the tabernacle.
25. And he lighted the lamps before the Eternal One; as the Eternal One commanded Moses.
26. And he put the golden altar in the Tent of the Meeting before the veil;
27. And he burned sweet incense on it; as the Eternal One commanded Moses.
28. And he set up the screen at the door of the tabernacle.
29. And he put the altar of burnt offering by the door of the tabernacle of the Tent of the Meeting, and offered upon it the burnt offering and the meal offering; as the Eternal One commanded Moses.
30. And he set the basin between the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and put water there, for washing.
31. And Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands and their feet there;
32. When they went into the Tent of Meeting, and when they came near to the altar, they washed; as the Eternal One commanded Moses.
33. And he erected the court around the tabernacle and the altar, and set up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work.
34. Then a cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Eternal One filled the tabernacle.
35. And Moses was not able to enter into the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud abode on it, and the glory of the Eternal One filled the tabernacle.
36. And when the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the children of Israel went onward in all their journeys;
37. But if the cloud was not taken up, then they journeyed not till the day that it was taken up.
38. For the cloud of the Eternal One was upon the tabernacle by day, and fire was on it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.

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Shabbat as a Sanctuary in Time

By Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

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The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals, the Jewish equivalent of sacred architecture.

Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time. Unlike the space-minded man to whom time is unvaried, iterative, homogeneous, to whom all hours are alike, quality-less, empty shells, the Bible senses the diversified character of time. There are no two hours alike. Every hour is unique and the only one given at the moment, exclusive and endlessly precious.

Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of a year. The Sabbaths are our great cathedrals; and our Holy of Holies is a shrine that neither the Romans nor the Germans were able to burn; a shrine that even apostasy cannot easily obliterate: the Day of Atonement. According to the ancient rabbis, it is not the observance of the Day of Atonement, but the Day itself, the "essence of the Day," which, with man's repentance, atones for the sins of man. hourglass

Jewish ritual may be characterized as the art of significant forms in time, as architecture of time. Most of its observances—the Sabbath, the New Moon, the festivals, the Sabbatical and the Jubilee year—depend on a certain hour of the day or season of the year. It is, for example, the evening, morning, or afternoon that brings with it the call to prayer. The main themes of faith lie in the realm of time. We remember the day of the exodus from Egypt, the day when Israel stood at Sinai; and our Messianic hope is the expectation of a day, of the end of days.

In a well-composed work of art an idea of outstanding importance is not introduced haphazardly, but, like a king at an official ceremony, it is presented at a moment and in a way that will bring to light its authority and leadership. In the Bible, words are employed with exquisite care, particularly those which, like pillars of fire, lead the way in the far-flung system of the biblical world of meaning.

One of the most distinguished words in the Bible is the word *kadosh*, holy; a word which more than any other is representative of the mystery and majesty of the divine. Now what was the first holy object in the history of the world? Was it a mountain? Was it an altar?

It is, indeed, a unique occasion at which the distinguished word *kadosh* is used for the first time: in the Book of Genesis at the end of the story of creation. How extremely significant is the fact that it is applied to time: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy." There is no reference in the record of creation to any object in space that would be endowed with the quality of holiness.

This is a radical departure from accustomed religious thinking. The mythical mind would expect that, after heaven and earth have been established, God would create a holy place—a holy mountain or a holy spring—whereupon a sanctuary is to be established. Yet it seems as if to the Bible it is holiness in time, the Sabbath, which comes first.

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When history began, there was only one holiness in the world, holiness in time. When at Sinai the word of God was about to be voiced, a call for holiness in man was proclaimed: "Thou shalt be unto me a holy people." It was only after the people had succumbed to the temptation of worshipping a thing, a golden calf, that the erection of a Tabernacle, of holiness in space, was commanded. The sanctity of time came first, the sanctity of man came second, and the sanctity of space last. Time was hallowed by God; space, the Tabernacle, was consecrated by Moses.

While the festivals celebrate events that happened in time, the date of the month assigned for each festival in the calendar is determined by the life in nature. Passover and the Feast of Booths [Sukkot], for example, coincide with the full moon, and the date of all festivals is a day in the month, and the month is a reflection of what goes on periodically in the realm of nature, since the Jewish month begins with the new moon, with the reappearance of the lunar crescent in the evening sky. In contrast, the Sabbath is entirely independent of the month and unrelated to the moon. Its date is not determined by any event in nature, such as the new moon, but by the act of creation. Thus the essence of the Sabbath is completely detached from the world of space.

The meaning of the Sabbath is to celebrate time rather than space. Six days a week we live under the tyranny of things of space; on the Sabbath we try to become attuned to holiness in time. It is a day on which we are called upon to share in what is eternal in time, to turn from the results of creation to the mystery of creation, from the world of creation to the creation of the world.