

*Pardes Hannah Theme for Yamim Nora'im 5776: Mishkan: Sanctuary—Encountering the Sacred in Space and Time. A Letter from Reb Elliot to the Pardes Hannah Community and Diaspora, Page 1*

19 Av 5775, August 4 2015 (revisited in early September, later-Ellul, continuing unto the very doorstep of Rosh ha-Shanah!)

Pardes Hannah de-Michigan (Ann Arbor)

Dear ones,

Ahlan! *Shalom aleikhem!* Spirited Salutations! Yo!

I hope this finds you healthy and well. I am writing in late Av/early August. The tomatoes are swelling on the vine, the echinacea are efflorescing brilliantly, and there is a ripeness in the air. The days are growing shorter. Yes, it's that time of year again: time for turning and introspection.

Ellul beckons.

Each year the Pardes Hannah community selects a theme to guide us through the *Yamim Nora'im* (Days of Awe). Community members reflect on this theme, and at various points during the services, share some way its key concepts have resonated in their lives. (We call this a *vort*—from the Yiddish, or in Hebrew, a *d'var*—meaning a *Word* [of Torah], “a little that contains a lot.”<sup>1</sup>) It is one of the ways that we, as a community, do *heshbon nefesh* (spiritual account-taking) for the year past, while opening up new personal and communal “heart-space” for the year that is aborning. This year's theme (as decided upon by our steering committee) is ***Mishkan/ Sanctuary—Encountering the Sacred in Space and Time***. Stemming from the Hebrew root שכן—SH-K-N—dwelling, *mishkan* serves as a rubric, a dedicated vessel that holds or reveals some Presence, where the *Shekhinah* abides. Community members will reflect on moments or sites, large and small, ordinary and extraordinary, where this *more* has been glimpsed. This *vort-ing* (*dvar-bling?*) is one of the ways we teach, sing, inspire, con-spire/ **breathe with** each other. And over the course of the ten Days of Awe, who knows? We may find that something magical will have emerged—that we will have (*inshallah*, God-willing) created a *mishkan* for and of Community, a place where spirit might flow like an open brook!

**Note: Some Questions for Further Thought may be found on pages 11-12! Enjoy...**

### **I. Sanctuaries in Space: *mishkenot be-hallal*.**

There are moments where life intensifies, where a veil momentarily parts and mystery (or perhaps, Presence) is touched. This may happen in traditionally demarcated sites: in *shul* and **places of prayer** (*miqdash me'at*<sup>2</sup>); at the *beit midrash*—in a **House of Study**<sup>3</sup> where deep

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1. D'var: short for D'var Torah. The phrase “a little that contains a lot,” המועט המחזיק את המרובה is from *Midrash Bereshit Rabbah* 5:7 et al. For us: a brief teaching that resonates.

2. a synagogue traditionally is called a *miqdash me'at*, a small Sanctuary, a temple in miniature.

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inquiry is pursued or new Torah emerges (be it alone or *be-havruta*, in spirited fellowship); or perhaps, **at home** while lighting Shabbat candles or while blessing the children: hands touching precious *keppelekh*.<sup>4</sup>

But it may also happen (as Nahman of Breslov knew) while walking in the **forest** (Hebrew: *Ya'aR/עיר*, said to be a place of awakening—'YR/עיר) or in untamed **Wilderness** (Hebrew: *MiDBaR/מדבר*, a place where silence, and the more-than-human, *speaks*, *MeDaBeR/מדבר*). The Zohar, masterpiece of Jewish Mysticism, speaks of verdant sites where the divine abundance or *shefa* flows: e.g., a Fountain in the Galilee, an **artesian well or Pool** (*breikhah*) teeming with life. The mystics imaginatively link the word for Pond or Pool (*breikhah/בריכה*) with the stream of blessing (*brakhah/ברכה*). As anthropologist Loren Eiseley once put it, “if there is magic, it is in water.” No wonder that the **healing waters of *miqveh*** are linked both etymologically and midrashically to the gathering of *hope* (yet another meaning of the term, *miqveh*).<sup>5</sup> In those waters we may feel weightless, carried, open to regeneration. As Jeremiah (17:3) put it, and Rabbi Aqiva riffed, *Miqveh Yisrael YHWH: Divinity is the Hope and the Healing Bath of the people Israel*.<sup>6</sup> God as Place of Transformation. *Ha-Maqom*.<sup>7</sup>

And yet: we all know that the holy may be glimpsed in **places of lowliness** too—in a provisional, rickety booth or **Sukkah**, open to the elements; even in places of brokenness and ruin. *Shekhinah, the divine presence, dwells there too*. “God is with you in your travail,” says Isaiah, (63:9) And: “God dwells where we let Her in.” (recasting the Kotzker) **Sanctuary (much like suffering) must not wall us off, but should help us open out**. *In our moments of separation, we are invited to at least re-spect the Other, i.e., to look again more deeply, to be less inured or defended*. So each morning, the prayer: <sup>8</sup>המעביר שינה מעיני ותנומה מעפעפי—May the Holy Breathing Spirit of the World help us find skillful ways to remove the extra armor we have donned to be in this world. Please, God, help us lift the occluding veils.

Building on this, we find other examples of *Mishkan*, *overlooked* sites of indwelling Presence: Might we not craft a theology of Dumps, of **Garbage or “Waste,”** a compote of compost, fashioned from those sites which uncannily reveal how we take in and metabolize the planet—how we, by turns, inhale, consume, despoil, deconstruct, ferment, recombine, recycle/turn over, and perhaps even, return **to** the earth. What the hasidic masters call “returning the *letters of Creation* to their Source.” For we are forging an earth-based Judaism: coming **Home**

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3. *beit midrash*: lit., a house of inquiry, of deeper understanding.

4. Yiddish, diminutive for “heads.”

5. Pooled Water, pooled Hope: especially apt in a region that is perched *on the edge* of desert.

6. On *miqveh* as hope, see Jer. 17:3; on *miqveh* as bath, see Aqiva's wordplay in m. Yoma 8:9.

7. *Maqom*, Hebrew for Place. See below for explanation. Not to be confused with Maqom County, erstwhile bastion of the Reagan Democrats...*heheh*.

8. From the morning blessings: “removing sleep from our eyes, and slumber from our eyelids.” Removing the film from our seeing.

to **Gaia** (גאה-יה<sup>9</sup>), which Reb Zalman has called a divine Interface: permeable membrane between the Infinite and the finite. So here we are in the *mishkan* of compostable earth, finding new-old ways to heal and be healed. (And yet: how we hide all this rot from our eyes and nose! Wall it off, in-house and “out-”.)<sup>10</sup> But תסתכלו שנית, look again: Re-spect/in-spect the **motherlog** in the redwood forest, and you will see the *ratzo va-shov*, the ebb and flow of life all at once, *ha-kol be-vat ahat*.<sup>11</sup> Or next April, consider the common **shrub in County Farm Park**: last year’s dead berry and this year’s tender bud suspended on the selfsame branch. In the words of the midrash, ממית ומחיה בבת אחת: God killing and giving life in the same moment. How do we manage to “hold” this simultaneity of life and death, this layered reality of rot and rise, without going plum mad?! Or, if you druther, peer into **limestone** and you will see the trace of organic life—former seashells and bones—transmuted into rock by the press of the centuries. Thus, the hasidic saying: “**Stones** too are living things; they just breathe more slowly.” And so, *uve-khen*, at some point, ונפל לנו האסימון, we come to “get/grok” the Kabbalistic gimatriyah of Abraham Abulafia and Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto: אלהים = הטבע, *Elohim = ha-Teva’ (God = Nature*,<sup>12</sup> for both are numerically 86 in Hebrew)! We are, they slyly telegraph, **walking inside God**, *Ha-Maqom, The Holy One, who is the Place of the World*.<sup>13</sup> Yup: we are an infinitesimal part of that ever-dancing divine gestalt; each of us fleeting, yet precious beyond all *reasonable* measure.

So איתמהא, how amazing, that the sacred, the uncanny, the numinous may bloom in hidden places or unlikely spots: not only on rarified **Sinai mountaintops**, but in the most prickly of places—like Moses’ encounter at the dessicated **Thorn Bush**. In the words of the kabbalist, *leit atar panui minei (Tiqqunei ha-Zohar)*—“there is no place (no matter how lowly) devoid of the divine.” More on this *khap*, this insight, *anon*.

So you, dear reader, I invite you to reflect: what are the places that have been significant, perhaps even holy, for you over the past year? Be it the **kitchen, the bedroom<sup>14</sup> or boardroom**; an outcropping on **Lake Michigan** or the jasmine-wafting **streets of Jerusalem**; or **the furrows**, all loamy, of the community garden? Have these sites of transport been

9. My Hebrew word-play, Ga’ah-Yah: “the rising tide of Yah-consciousness.”

10. Is there really any such thing as an *out-house*? Isn’t it all really *in-house*, when earth is our home? Two metaphors for the range of options of our inter-being: the plastic bags from California that end up fouling the shore of Chile; and the rose or squash growing in the compost heap (*a la* Thich Nhat Hanh).

11. See Midrash Tanhuma to Ex. 20:8

12. Or as Spinoza had it, *deus sive natura*. Of course, while Spinoza was a pantheist, the kabbalists were panentheists: meaning, the world is *in* God, even as divinity extends beyond world: *sovev u-memale’*.

13. Midrash Genesis Rabbah 68:10:

ויפגע במקום, ר' הונא בשם ר' אמי אמר מפני מה מכנין שמו של הקב"ה וקוראין אותו מקום, שהוא מקומו של עולם ואין עולמו מקומו, מן מה דכתיב (שמות ל"ג) הנה מקום אתי, הוי הקב"ה מקומו של עולם ואין עולמו מקומו...

14. See Avraham Azulai, *Or ha-Hammah to Zohar parashat Shemot*, “The *Shekhinah* rests on their bed, because of their attunement with the [divine] union on high. Their marital bed becomes a Chariot for the *Shekhinah*, who is called the Bed [of Love].”

spontaneous unicums (one-hit wonders, something you *chanced upon* and then left) or have they been recurring, intentional sites—places you *cultivate*, such as an **altar in your home, a garden or a nook**.<sup>15</sup> Where are the spots where radical amazement has unfolded. What are the places where we feel small, **and** enlarged, **and** deeply connected, **all at once**.<sup>16</sup> For some of us, it is at the **Ocean** or in a **Starfield**;<sup>17</sup> for others of us, it is in the warrens of the city, its **ragtag alleys and bustling cafes**, where *Shekhinah* is most likely to reveal Her face. As Laura Nyro once sang, “Sidewalk and pigeon, you look like a city, but you seem like religion to me.”<sup>18</sup>

Or perhaps, *Mishkan* is the miracle of our **embodied being**, as Elazar Aziqri of Tsfat taught in his *Sefer Haredim* [*Book of the Quakers*, fol. 66b & 69b]:

And you, mortal, know that **your soul is the seat of God**...For the principle dwelling place of the *Shekhinah* is **the heart**, as in: “Make for me a *mishkan* and I will dwell among them.” (Ex. 25:8) And in this fashion has Rashbi explained the verse “for YHWH your God walks in the midst of your camp.” (Deut. 23:15)—*be-qerev*, the “midst,” that is, the heart which is in the midst of *mahanekha*, your “camp,” i.e., the body...How much, therefore, should a person sanctify him/her/hirself in body, heart and soul, since s/he/ze is a temple [*miqdasho*] of the Holy King.... “Prepare to meet your God, O Israel” (Amos 4:12), for “your soul is God’s throne and your heart is God’s footstool” (ff. Isa. 66:1)...and “where is the place of God’s rest?” It is in the heart, as the sages have said: **God exists in the heart of God’s lovers**...One who receives royalty in one’s home, would s/he/ze not sweep it and clean it? Since our hearts are God’s Home, we should sweep from them all the rubble and dust of wayward thoughts...and purge it, beautify it with purifying water, *rose water*—with one’s tears.” (my translation, drawing and expanding on RJZ Werblowsky in his *Joseph Karo*: 69)

For us here in Metro Detroit and Ann Arbor, in Sutton’s Bay and Kalamazoo, might there not be an added resonance here, tied in with the holiness of Word-Plays aka Word-Place: *Al tiqrei* (read not) *Pure Mishkan, ella* (but rather) *Pure Michigan*?! (Wink wink. Sorry Toledo. Gotta

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15. You *visit* the first kind of places, whereas you *dwell or sit in* the second. Cf. Psalm 27: 4: שְׁבִתִּי בְּבֵית: יְהוָה וְלִבְיָדָי יִשְׁכְּנוּ: “Dwelling in the house of YHWH all my days...and visiting His shrine.” On nooks and niches, see the work of Gaston Bachelard!

16. Indeed, space and time that coincide to produce *the sacred*... The Hebrew word *olam* captures this space-time coincidence, meaning both *world* and *eternity*. Interestingly, in Rabbinic Jewish tradition it is Time more often than Space that has been ritually celebrated. (Think of Revelation, and the centrality of Shavuot ritual **in Sivan** as opposed to the geographic Mount Sinai). More broadly on feeling simultaneously small and enlarged when encountering the holy, see the introduction to Art Green’s brilliant, *Seek My Face*, esp. pp. xix-xx.

17. Cf. Bruce Cockburn’s magnificent song, “[Lord of the Starfield](#).”

18. from “New York Tendaberry.” LN left us too soon.

admit: the coincidence is downright Eerie.<sup>19)</sup>

I would be remiss if I didn't say two more things about *Mishkan*/Sanctuary: How we unpack this theme may also depend on the language in which we think. If we think in Hebrew, *Mishkan* suggests an intensified place of *indwelling* presence, immanence. If we think of the Biblical Mishkan, we think of a structure that is co-created by a community, constructed out of the raw stuff of people's freewill offerings, that is yet light-weight—portable. In some traditional accounts, Mishkan is the place of intensified divine presence, fraught with danger, to be entered carefully and properly (by the right person at the right time). (That said, while it is the High Priest who alone enters the Holy of Holies<sup>20</sup> and then only on Yom Kippur, the Talmud speaks of the janitor-priests, who, existing below the radar, can be lowered into that Sanctum at ordinary moments: to clean the space! In this, lies a subtle lesson...how to steal into the Sanctum, a trickster's delight!)<sup>21</sup>

In other Rabbinic accounts, *Mishkan* is simply a metonymy for the whole world (a microcosm), a demarcated place that contains (in *nuce*, in miniature) the divine presence that is diffused everywhere: מלא כל הארץ כבודו. In one midrash, the *Mishkan* is like a cave into which the sea flows. Or to give a more North American example: if you are at Niagra Falls, and you are thirsty, it helps to have a glass. The Mishkan is that glass....enabling us to drink in the divine in accessible measure.

And yet, according to other readers (Maimonides, Jonathan Omer-Man), Mishkan is also the place of less intense, *read* daily, access. After the blazing incandescence or peak experience of Sinai (meeting God face to face), the *Mishkan* is like the 40-watt bulb of daily practice, a domesticated space where the subtle rustling of spirit can be nurtured.<sup>22</sup>

All this pops up if you are thinking in Hebrew. But perhaps you are (also) thinking in English: our translation of *Sanctuary* connotes a place of refuge, of quiet, a place to be tended, where the holy unfolds.

Both connotations are fair game for us at Pardes Hannah, we who live in two, nay in multiple, worlds. I would be remiss if I didn't say something about the enormous roiling of humanity in our day, especially in these last days, as we witness the movement of hundreds of thousands of refugees from the Middle East, desperately seeking respite/sanctuary from bloodshed and starvation, from drought, from radical uncertainty, from loss of Hope and Home. Perhaps in

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19. Fear not, holy Toledans your salutary pun is coming...

20. in the successor to the portable *mishkan/Dwelling*, which is to say, בית המקדש, the Temple or fixed Sanctuary.

21. See the recent exhibit of [Ramiro Gomez](#), held at the University of Michigan Humanities Institute Gallery. Gomez directs ocular attention to workers/nannies/gardeners/janitors, who are often “invisible” yet who keep things running. By analogy, might daily practice be like the repetitive (hidden yet irreplaceable) work needed to keep spirit flowing? I think of Reb Zalman's frequent citation of the verse from the daily Qedushah/Sanctus, והקדושים בכל יום יהללוך סלה, the sacred ones are those who know how to daily sing God's praises, who do the work day in day out, in the holiness of the everyday.

22. See n. 21

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Hebrew the word that comes to mind is *miqlat*, a site of guaranteed refuge and safety. Of absorption. Where does Sanctuary lie, and what is our fundamental responsibility to those fellow human beings who are homeless...including those who may not (to put it baldly) love us or like us. A conundrum to live with, to respond to with open heart/open mind, in these freighted Days of Awe.

So here we are, in our belief and our disbelief, our skepticism and foundational trust, encountering the sacred, the *moreness* of life alongside its fragility—sensing the **deep structure** encoded in Space. How do we celebrate the insights of Place? And what rituals accompany and deepen our comings and goings: How do we mindfully enter such places, and how do we take leave of them, taking their afterglow (their *nachleben*, their inner music) with us? In Rabbinic tradition, one walked backwards when leaving the Temple, always “facing” the Presence, till one had fully absorbed it. But this choreography does not always play out so cleanly for us: sometimes we recognize the gift of the moment only *afterwards*. So the question is not only how we might catch the glimpses, but how we can cultivate—recognize, retrieve, unpack, integrate, savor, and sustain—them? As the Kotzker had it: **how to remain awake?** He cites a verse, wherein God addresses Moses, and the seeker in us all<sup>23</sup>: עֲלֵה אֵלַי וְהָרָה נְהִיָּה שָׁמָּה (Ex. 24:12): “Come up to Me in the mountain, and be there.” Why, the Kotzker asks, does the Torah add the seemingly superfluous phrase, “and be there.” He replies: because sometimes in the act of climbing up, in the excitement of arriving, we forget to “be there.” (*Emet ve-Emunah*<sup>24</sup>)

## II. Sanctuaries in Time: *mishkenot bi-z'man*

We Jews are a people who came into full (or at least Rabbinic) identity only after the Destruction of the Jewish Sacred Center, the Temple. And so, in Jewish tradition, our Sanctuaries, our *mishkenot u-miqdashim*, have tended to unfold not only in Space, but in Time—that dimension of existence that was not controlled so fully by the conquerors.<sup>25</sup> As Arthur Green teaches (historicizing the midrashic insights of Heschel): Deprived of sacred space, Jews made Shabbat their (our!) *mishkan*, a sacred Center and Sanctuary — in Time. No matter where we are during the week, **on Shabbat we enter “Holy Ground”;** **we come Home**, to practice the Art of Menuḥah (Rest). As we recalibrate, we are invited to live from our fullest selves and to more fully love, knowing (in our bones) that we too, *even we* (historical denizens of exile and displacement), are loved. The indwelling of the Shekhinah is said to become more palpable, and we can bask in Her glow. Shabbat, so understood, is not only a day but **an atmosphere**, in which we move (as Reb Zalman used to say) from Human Doing to Human Being. As Friday afternoon, the kabbalists say, the divine tide rises, lifting us

23. On the Moses consciousness in us all, on Moses as “expanded awareness,” see Levi Yitzhak of Berditchev, *Shmu'ah Tovah, Be-ha'alotkha*:

משה נקרא השכל שיש באדם, כח לצאת משכל ההוא [הקטן] ולבא לשכל האחר [מוחין דגדלות], לדגור האין.

24. I first learned this teaching from R. David Wolfe-Blank, of blessed memory.

25. It was Art Green who first made this case in his article “Sabbath as Temple.”

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all into the world of *Atzilut*/heightened Being. We slow down, give a *krekhtz*—a deep renewing sigh<sup>26</sup>, and breathe in the love.

We might think of **Shabbat as a hyperbaric chamber for the soul**, the day (as Nahman of Breslov playfully taught) of the *neshimah yeterah*<sup>27</sup>, the Deep Breath that reaches into the most asphyxiated places in our soul. If God is variously called *Shekhinah* (the **Indwelling Presence**) or *ha-Maqom*, the substantive Place, divinity is also conceived as **Dwell-ing, qua gerund or even verb**: God Godding—divinity dancing in perfect Time. The most potent divine Name, the unpronouncable *YHWH*, ineffably evokes *be-ing*, while from the mystical perspective it connotes the All-Being as *Inter-being*, a weave of Life. (We are inside, but also part of, the divine Ecosystem.) As the early 17th century kabbalist Isaiah Horowitz put it, **YHWH is an impossible conflation of Is (HWH), Was (HYH) and Will-Be (YHH), all at once. With a rare combination of effort and grace, we can attain glimpses of that multi-tiered reality. But the architecture of Shabbat, the mystics teach, smooths the path: the 26 hours of Shabbat, become a more accessible vessel (a concentrated *mishkan*) for experiencing the rhythmic unfolding of YHWH, one God-quantum per hour.**<sup>28</sup>

Kant taught that we experience the world through the categories of Time and Space. Students of religion, like William Paden<sup>29</sup>, have noted that temporal ritual “constructs its own space.” We “enter” our most elaborate holidays like we enter a mansion, with antechambers and tricliniums, its bedrooms and closets, its gardens and inner chambers. Not to mention its (musty?) basement! (Bring on our inner-janitor!) Not surprisingly, the Jewish people have fashioned a calendar of holiness that assumes architectural dimensions. Each holiday is a kind of *heikhal* or “chamber” affording a unique encounter with the divine. Some examples, from Rabbinic tradition: Sukkot is seen as a catered feast in a vast dining room (the Temple!), with an international cast of distinguished guests. By contrast, the day after Sukkot, *Shmini Atzeret*, is likened to a simple meal in the kitchen. It’s just the immediate family now, and the bridal couple, after all the guests have left. A meal of leftovers, that is all the sweeter! To enter Shabbat is to enter a *huppah* (wedding canopy); Friday night unfolds like *Sukkat Shalom*, a Sukkah of Tranquility, while (to return to the *Mishkan* image) the mystical peak of Shabbat, the Third Meal (*seudah shelishit*), affords entry into the innermost shrine, the Holy of Holies.<sup>30</sup> (Note that in this mystical understanding, we all enter the holy of holies, we are all

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26. Ff. Nahman of Breslov, *Liqqutei Moharan* 1:8 and Nathan of Nemirov, *Liqqutei Halakhot*, Shabbat §1.

27. a wordplay on the term for the Sabbath-soul, the *neshamah yeterah*, lit. the extra soul-breath. See n. 26.

28. In *gimatriyah*, YHWH is 26 (10+5+6+5), here said to correspond to the 26 hours of Shabbat, marked in some communities. To observe Shabbat, in other words, is to correlate one’s receptors/expanded awareness (*moḥin de-gadlut*) with the rhythmic unfolding of HaVaYaH (Being)—to attune to God’s unfolding in Time. Jewish jazz, *Be-bop*.

29. See his *Religious Worlds* (Beacon, 1994), esp. the chapter “Ritual and Time,” 97.

30. See the Piasetzner Rebbe, Kalonymus Kalman Shapira’s *B’nai Maḥshavah Tovah*, sec. 11; English translation, *Conscious Community*, by Andrea Cohn-Kiener, pp. 29-30.

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high priests!) And to return to our inaugural Sanctuary image, Shabbat is the Mishkan gives structural integrity to the round of the year:<sup>31</sup> it is the hub for the six spoked-wheel of the Week; the anchor or portable Sacred Center amidst our fluctuating daily journey through the Wilderness. *Wherever we go, there Shabbat is.* Just as the twelve tribes arranged themselves symmetrically around the Mishkan as they wandered in the Desert (*Numbers*, chap. 2), so Jews have historically arranged their weekly spiritual lives around Shabbat—an Axis, as Hendrix would add, Bold as Love. *Or for those of you who prefer your rock gods to be insurance executives, here's one from Wallace Stevens: Shabbat is like his "[Jar in Tennessee](#)," a vessel that organizes and tames the space around it, providing orientation, spiritual GPS, the possibility of Home.*

And finally, in another architectural image, the kabbalists interpreted the commandment *la-'asot et ha-shabbat le-DoRoTam*<sup>32</sup>, to mean that we are bidden to make of each Shabbat a *dirah*, an abode for the *Shekhinah*. Indeed, the kabbalists make the daring claim that *Shabbat* is a name for God—integrated divinity in the modality of Time. On the seventh day, there is an interpenetration of holy beings: **As we enter Shabbat, Shabbat enters us.** We harbor the Harbor, make place for the Place. We hold the Shekhinah and are held. Floating on the rising tide of eros, we find a deeper calm.

In a broader sense, the Jewish holiday cycle is an oscillation between “inner space” and “outer space, an alternation between swimming inward (spiritual introversion, *tiqqun ha-lev*) and flowing outward (extroversion, *tiqqun olam*). We learn to surf the sacred calendar, and even to juggle multiple calendars. We hold low points in the Jewish calendar with what may be high points in our personal lives. We learn to enter the New Year in Nissan, again in Tishrei and again in January (which we share with the world at large). We rejoice on Shabbat (that open Sukkah of Peace) while making Saturday pilgrimages to the Big House. We find sanctuaries in churches and shuls, Sufi caves and Zen gardens; Shabbat in Tsfat and Sunday in Harlem; we seek sparks of life, *nitzozot ha-qodesh*, day in day out in the ruined (and restored) gardens of the earth. We who live in multiple dimensions and worlds...We who know that if we are God's beloveds, so too are the other Peoples of the planet.

### **III. Home-Coming: Getting Personal (and maybe even, Transpersonal)**

*So, to bring it all back home:* what peaks and valleys have we climbed over the past year, what steady (not to say, tedious) terrain we have trod in 5775? What does it mean to look back at our travels, to assay our sowing and our yield, our insights and our not-seeing, our breakthroughs and our irreplaceable losses. At this pivotal moment, we gaze Janus-like, *Tishrei-*

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31. On this, see Franz Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption*.

32. to observe the Sabbath throughout the generations (Exodus 31:16). כתיב חסר is here written כתיב חסר, without the usual *vav*, making the word-play more plausible: instead of דורותם, their generations, we may read דרתם, their apartment(s)!

like, both fore and aft<sup>33</sup> and ask: What does it mean to “enter” this New Year, to go deep on Yom Kippur into Sacred Space-Time, into the divine Miqveh—to spend all that time *chanting, encountering, swaying, purging, spacing out, honing, homing in, shmushn, no-wording, litanizing, lionizing, re-memembering, re-balancing, re-turning, re-specting, fasting, slowing down, bathing in the aural miqveh of the shofar. Releasing ourselves from our ordinary roles to do **the inside work**. מותר לך. And then: No sooner is the *teqi'ah gedolah*, the great Blast, sounded and Yom Kippur over—than we flow **outward**, back into the “surrounding world”—into our beautiful, broken world that so needs healing and more justice. So, in the days after, we gather our rustic *sukkah-stuff*. We who have spent so much time “inside,” take our insides outside, literally, as we move out-of-doors, to build and then enter the Sukkah, which must be provisional, and open to the elements. In this Trusting Space, we *practice at Elemental Gratitude and emunah*. (May it not rain, just yet! May it not snow, till... October!) We have the gift of contemplating: where is Home? Where and how do we arrange ourselves? In what structures and relationships do we root ourselves? With what Names, what niggunim, do we call out to God? And what, in our lives—in our farms and our cities, our forests and our seas, our markets and our roads—needs fixing/tiqqun? How is Michigan also Mishkan? (Ok, and: our Toledo, our *toledah*—our just yield ;-). How do we begin *again, this time just a tad more skillfully*? Inshallah.*

Let me end with a *mini-drash*. In Exodus 28:8, we read “*ve-asu li miqdash, ve-shakhanti betokham*”—Make Me a sanctuary and I (God) will dwell among them.” Which I hear as *also* saying to us: Make Me a Sanctuary—Create homes and streets, countries and ports, schools and workplaces—*mishkenot*—where bounty is shared, where the sacred is nurtured. Fashion vessels (places of feeding, recycling and healing) through which the divine may flow freely, never clogging too much in one place. Co-create moments and refuges in time, where the heart can open. Where embodied soul can meet embodied soul and sharing occur. Time-spaces where the homeless are seen and harbored.

Now inside the biblical Sanctuary in the Wilderness was the *Ohel Mo'ed*, the **Tent of Meeting**, where the divine manifest itself most palpably.<sup>34</sup> As though to say: Face to face, one heart beating. Analogically, we are enjoined to fashion communities of heart where real Meeting can take place: where people let others in and people have a stake in each other's life.<sup>35</sup> Where one can see and be seen. As ben Azzai noted, if we cannot love the other, at least we can practice caring: “even when there is no love, there is still the divine image.”<sup>36</sup>

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33. Recall that the Lurianic Name for Tishrei is *WHYH*, which in Hebrew means both “and it was”; and “it will be”!

34. I am thinking here of the verse from Isaiah 55:6: *בְּרֵשׁוּ יְדוּד בְּהִמְצְאוֹ קִרְבָּהוּ בְּקִירוֹתוֹ קְרוּב* “Seek God where God may be found, seek the divine where it is near.”

35. Here it is best to not aim too high: If they cannot love each other (as per the *klal* of Rabbi Aqiva), at least they can (*ff. Ben Azzai*) care: see the other as *tzelem elohim*: an image of God.

36. This quotation comes from Art Green's *Seek My Face*, and builds on talmud yer. Nedarim 9:4.

Make Me a sanctuary and **I (God) will dwell among them.**” The conclusion of our verse suggests that divine resides not only *beyond* or solely *within* each person, but also *between* folks, “in their midst,” in the empty space that both separates and connects.<sup>37</sup> Where if you listen to the many hearts pulsing, you also hear the One Heart beating. Thus, reading in a hasidic vein, *panim be-fanim dibber YHWH imakhem*, “face to face YHWH spoke to you,” (Deut. 5:4) may come to mean: “**When** you stand face to face *with another*, **then** the divine can unfold—in The Between.” As many commentators have noted, Scripture does not say, I will dwell in *it*, in the **Mishkan**, but rather I will dwell among *them*, amidst the People, *in the realm of The-Between. For what is the true mishkan if not the kehillah/community*: both the space we occupy and the space we leave for others, for a future. May our community serve as such a Sanctuary, where the divine (and we) can unfold, where we can both hear many hearts and (in the empty space) the beating of the One.

**A kind of maftir or post-script.** From the large miracles, Nahmanides teaches, we come to appreciate the small ones. From those Extraordinary Moments where our heart splits open and soars, we come to *grok* that *leit atar panui minei*, all places, all moments, the most quotidian included, can be sites of revelation and amazement. But the opposite-in-scale is also true: from our small sanctuaries, from attending closely to the local, we come to see how interrelated we are, how global and grand, how vital, our citizenship. **The planet is our motherlog.** As minds and hearts stretch through time and space, we come to realize that the **whole Earth is our Mishkan, site of the Shekhinah, our Gaia (in my word-play, our גאה-יה: the rising wave of Yah<sup>38</sup>)**. How to enter this Mishkan, and how to leave it more whole? How to attend to *Shekhinah*'s cry, and yet sing Her song? How, in short, to be partners *with*? That is the question/the quest-ing<sup>39</sup> of this season. May we inquire honestly, and drink deeply of the life we are granted. *Le-chayyim!*

Reb Elliot Tchaikovsky, he of the multiple endings, prays:

Friends, Hevrayya—

May this be a year of renewal and good health (Amen!); of radical amazement and hope (Amen!); of perseverance, resilience and enoughness (Amen!); a year of deep connections with loved ones, mid-course corrections, and of small openings with our sworn enemies (Amen!); a year graced by moments of *ahavat hinam*—causeless love, edgy humor and deep song; a year of opening and stitching, stretching and gratitude.

May we all be blessed to do the work we are called upon to do, to be well deployed (*Venomar* Amen!)

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37. And we are learning to stretch being specie-ist boundaries too, beyond human-ism, recognizing the life-force that courses through other species. We are at the beginning of the way.

38. Cf. Exod. 15:1 *כי גאה גאה לה' אשירה לה'*, which I re-read: I will sing unto YHWH, for the Gaia-Yah is rising, a cresting tide.

39. The Hebrew word for question, *she'elah* is related to *she'ol*: the Biblical netherworld. To ask a question, in this sense, is to be willing to go very deep.

*Pardes Hannah Theme for Yamim Nora'im 5776: Mishkan: Sanctuary—Encountering the Sacred in Space and Time. A Letter from Reb Elliot to the Pardes Hannah Community and Diaspora, Page 11*

לשנה טובה ומתוקה תיכתבו ותחתמו: *Shana tovah umetukah*, may this be a sweet year for you and your dear ones.

ותזכו לשנים רבות: As is said in Sefardi/Mizrahi tradition this time of year, here's to a long (rich) life!

Hope to see you and to *davven* with y'allses in the coming year!

Elliot

**Some questions for further thought:**

- (1) Where, for you, is Holy Ground? How has it shifted/remained the same over time? Is it experienced singularly or in group?
- (2) To what sites would you make a pilgrimage, an *aliyat regel*? (E.g., it is a dream of mine to one day make a pilgrimage to [James Turrell's Roden Crater](#))
- (3) Read the *Song of Songs* and reflect: How might a Garden be a site for encountering divine immanence? How does Garden differ from Field or Meadow? Or Forest? Or from a mikveh/pool/healing waters? Which seems most like a Mishkan/Dwelling to you?
- (4) Traditionally, one does not affix a mezuzah to a bathroom or outhouse. From a spiritual (if not halakhic) perspective, what are some of the arguments for and against placing a mezuzah there? (How might we conceive of Bathroom/Outhouse as Holy Ground; esp. an eco-friendly one!)
- (5) Do you treat certain rooms in your dwelling as “sacred space”? E.g., Reb Zalman and Eve decided never to hold an argument in their bedroom...they would go to other rooms to argue, and would try to go to sleep without hanging animus.
- (6) Can sites of ruin and mass murder, such as Auschwitz, contain sparks of holiness? Or is “holy” the wrong word for such sites? Are such places, like the former slave auction sites in New Orleans, places where a deep witnessing can (must) take place? Are these places where souls are still marooned? Where a *tiqqun*/soul-release and restoration must still take place? How to do this?
- (7) Why do bodhisattvas, e., meditate in the charnel fields?
- (8) How do we respond to the loss of Home for so many (refugees, those defaulted on their homes, the homeless)?
- (9a) Where is Home?
- (9b) Where in Detroit/Ann Arbor, etc. have you glimpsed something of the holy? (Also: in Toledo, etc. Jerusalem? D.C? Kalamazoo? The West Side of Cleveland?)
- (10) Do you have a place in your house that is dedicated to spiritual practice? To what extent is it a place “apart” (one of the meanings of *Qadosh*/holy in Hebrew)? To what extent is it an ideal microcosm of (or concentrated symbol for) the rest of the house?  
Is your refrigerator wall a shrine to your loved ones? And how do you feel about that?
- (11) Consider the graphic novel [Here](#) by Richard McGuire. To what extent does a pan-

historical perspective affect our understanding of Place? (Read it or about it and you will grasp my point!)

(12) Can you envision a future for our Place (on Earth)? How far out in time can you go?

(13) Comment on James Young's perceptive remark: "A common site of memory is not necessarily a site of common memory." (Example: the Noble Shrine/Har ha-Bayit/Temple Mount; or more broadly, Jerusalem) How do you stretch to hold the multiple narratives?

(14) Cultivate a site (in your house or in the woods, e.g.) for daily spiritual practice, between now and the *Yamim Nora'im*. Sit there. Walk its ground. Pray. Chant. Meditate. Observe the circumambient life, the play of light and shadow, the hot and cold, the dry and moist, the wind. Reflect on the insights, challenges, blessings that arise both from the practice and from the Place.

(15) Comment: At the seashore's edge, all footsteps disappear... (Rumi)

(16) Reflect: "Hospital/Hospice—holy ground."

(17) On moments of expansive consciousness/shifting awareness: e.g., where we move from experiencing the world as a "Particle" to experiencing it as "Wave on the ocean," (to use Buber and Richard Rubenstein's image.) E.g., it is good to experience the world as particle when negotiating a contract or crossing a street, or for that matter, most of the time; but it is good to experience the world as wave while praying, dancing, grieving, while eating amazing food, while making love...How do we skillfully move between states of awareness?

(18) Rites of Passage as a Sanctuary/Miqdash

(19) Shabbat as Sanctuary/Safe Space, where the most vulnerable aspects of our *neshamah*/soul-breath can unfold; where we can live from our largest selves. Practice preparing for Shabbat the way one would prepare for a visit from one's beloved. (And: what are the snares found in such noble hopes...i.e., each spiritual practice, has its traps, as Shefa Gold teaches.)

(20) How does the Jewish calendar keep you connected to the sun, moon, and stars?

And:

(21) A.J. Heschel: "This is one of the goals of the Jewish way of living: to experience **commonplace** deeds as **spiritual adventures**, to feel the hidden love and wisdom in all things." (from *God in Search of Man*)