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Bonna Devora Haberman

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## ISRAEL, A PALACE IN SPACE: A GENDERED RE-VISION OF TERRITORIALITY

Bonna Devora Haberman

Throughout thousands of years of exile and return, the Jewish People has been engaged with the sacredness of space and time. Deep cultural structures connect the Jewish People to our homeland, but at the same time, absent from the holy places and often persecuted in the Diaspora, we have regularly taken refuge in the sanctum of time. Yet Jewish sacred time is determined not only by the interactive cycles of the sun and the moon, but also by the seasons of rain and harvest in Israel. The sacred geography of the land of Israel undergirds the observance of the holy days. While espousing the sacredness of the land, Jewish culture has long been fraught with the contradiction between the promise of the land of Israel and its enduring “unattainability.” Beginning with some of the biblical scenes that produce this contradiction, this paper explores “Israel: A Palace in Space”—a corollary to A. J. Heschel’s view of the Sabbath as a “Palace in Time.”

Intricate time-space matrices inform Jewish metaphoric and material claims to the land of Israel. During the ancient Hasmonean period of Jewish sovereignty in Judea and during our own period of Israeli statehood, Jews have expressed claims to Israel in male-gendered territorial terms of entitlement, conquest, possession, and ownership. The Zionist transformation of Jewish exilic identity into Israeli militarist so-called masculine identity has proven problematic during recent decades. The problem is well indicated by the gendered polarization of power and roles in Israeli society and implicated in the endemic conflict with the Palestinians. In these days of violent desecration of the sacred body of Israel, feminist efforts toward peace will benefit from interpreting and critiquing our relationship to the sacredness of time and space. This paper wrestles with gender complexities of the Jewish people where we intersect with sacred land as considerations that are relevant to making peace. “Israel: A Palace in Space” acknowledges Jewish longing

for an ideal that Israel had once grown to symbolize as well as the reality of nationhood that exists in both space and time, riddled with strife and replete with creative potency. The fulfillment of the continuous longing for what was conceived as an unattainable Israel is a subtle process of consummating the Jewish covenant, proceeding toward a more redemptive state.

The Torah expresses Moses' ultimate moment of reckoning in terms of entering the land. By divine edict, Moses' privilege to go into Israel had been rescinded (Num. 20:11–12). As the people stands at the brink of entering the land, at the boundary of Israel and not-Israel, the great leader stands humble before God, fully accountable, vulnerable, wanting, hoping to influence his fate. I stretch open the moment of Moses' last stand, when his destiny is sealed.

I pleaded with God at that time. "O highest God, you have begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand, for what God is there in heaven or on earth who acts like You or with Your powers? Please let me cross over and see the good land which is on the other side of the Jordan. . . ." (Deut. 3:23–28)

Moses' last prayer collapses time and space into one desperate, unheeded petition to his Creator. In enforced exile, he records the messages recounted in the book of Deuteronomy.

The promised destiny of the Jewish people to inhabit the land of Israel had been one of the foundations of the original covenant between God and the patriarchs and matriarchs. "*Lekh lekha*, go to the land that I will show you" (Gen. 12:1) is a paradigmatic statement of God's commitment to the Jewish people. Journeys toward and exile from the land of Israel are one manifestation of the relationship between God and the Jewish people in material space. The Exodus from Egypt implies a vector pointing inexorably toward Israel, idealized as the locus of the fulfillment of the covenant.

Redemption from slavery in Egypt was a process of birth: from the confining tight space of enslavement in Egypt, through the birth canal of the narrow Red Sea passage, onto the dry desert land. Having entered the covenant at Sinai, the nation grew and matured through years of childhood and adolescence. Following the biblical narrative as a metaphor depicting the adolescent development of the Israelite nation, the crossing of the river Jordan is a rite of passage, a symbolic act of taking on adult responsibility for the processes

of life. In the desert, God provided soft, palatable food, manna; in Israel, the land would have to be worked, a livelihood earned. The direct nurturing of daily immanent contact with God, a parent during a Diaspora period of infancy and youth, would subside; fuller decision-making responsibility would fall upon the community in the realms of security, society, politics, law, and ritual observance. It has taken us nearly two thousand years to return to that moment of crossing, of moving across the new frontier to cohabit the sacred space with God.<sup>1</sup>

According to the Mishnah, the paradigmatic case of sacred space is the land of Israel. Ten concentric circles describe ever-increasing intensities of *kedushah*, holiness (*Kelim* 1:6). The land of Israel delimits the outer boundary of this spatial system of sanctity, which culminates in the most enclosed, private sanctuary within the Temple: the Holy of Holies. This rabbinic map describes ritualized motion inward into smaller, more contained, defined, exclusive space, in a purification process emphasizing meticulous preparation; attentiveness to human fitness to approach the sacred realm; and the actions required to contribute to the healthy function of the sacred system. Entering implies an intention to fulfill divine service precisely and thoroughly. One enters with fear, awe, and trepidation, to offer gratitude, arouse divine attention, secure blessing, or attain atonement.

On the surface, this mishnaic topographical structure of the holiness of Israel appears to map sacredness onto physical space, earthly territory. However, the currency of the text is sacredness in relation to distinctly human processes of community life: growing food, giving birth, menstruating, enduring illness, honoring the dead, seeking spiritual closeness. The text does not emphasize territorial possession or ownership claims to the sacred enclosure. The sole justification for presence in the sacred realm is desire and intention to sanctify life, using the activities and materials of an embodied community. The physical borders of the mishnaic scheme rely upon the self-disciplined practice and honor of the participants who uphold the sanctity of the space through their respectful actions.

The Service of the High Priest on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, exemplifies the spiritual valence of space. Into the Holy of Holies, only one specific priest may enter. In that place, at the appointed time, spatial holiness combines with temporal holiness at the maximum level of intensity (Lev. 16:3–24). The two sons of Aaron died when they approached the focal point of sacredness, *kedushah*, with a strange, somehow inappropriate fire

(Lev. 10:1–2). In holy space, the most minute action is magnified by the concentration of holiness. Where sensitivity peaks, subtleties of refinement and precision must be respected, and duly prepared. The extreme sensitivity of the sacred space disposes people toward intense, emotional, potentially violent expressions, as we witness in Jerusalem. There is also the possibility of spiritual/mystical interpretation.

The imagery of the Song of Songs abounds with eroticism about the lushness and fruitfulness of Israel in the context of a love relationship, a parable of love between God and the people of Israel. “I will go up into the date palm, I will grasp its boughs; and your breasts will be like clusters of the grape vine, your scent like apples” (Song of Songs 7:10). Indeed, the land itself expresses and responds with great subtlety to the behavior of the people. Rain is a blessing because it fulfills God’s yearning to engage with the land and the people and enables the land to be fertile and bear fruit. The growth of crops and trees is an expression of the longing of the land for God in heaven. The symbolic aspects of this relationship are intricately developed in the Temple functions, and in the systems of ordering dietary, spiritual, sexual, and social conduct that later replaced the Temple. More than a destination whose inherent quality is sacredness, according to this view, the land of Israel is a medium for God and the people of Israel to live in each other’s imminent presence, to work our relationship, to influence one another.

This rabbinic model of sacred space proposes a compelling, embodied alternative to transcendence. Gender analysis of the process reveals that sacred space is a complex system.<sup>2</sup> Interacting with it entails a set of reciprocal actions: Offering implies receiving. The sacredness of the physical place derives from the mutual intentions and activities of preparing for, approaching, engaging, and receding from the space. The ascription of gender to the actors is not fixed; The People of Israel are alternately “male” and “female,” depending upon their action. Entering into the sacred realm alludes to a male act; humble prostration, ritual immersion, intricate adornment, and receiving the divine presence are often associated with female gender. The divine is conceived as an active participant, receiving, evaluating, judging, and responding to Her partner, engaging in a relationship that manifests intense, erotic, and, sometimes, fatal desire.

For Moses, longing for the land must have increased and intensified with the passage of time and the approaching physical closeness. The saved

emotions welled in him and burst forth in his last request. The biblical reporting of the incident in the first person invites the reader to identify with Moses in his predicament. *Vaethanan*—I pleaded. According to the *Sifre*, a fourth century midrash, Moses chose the mode of *tehinah*, supplication, from among ten different modes of prayer. *Tehinah* is a personal request from a position of powerlessness. Moses feels that he has only begun to know God and experience God's greatness. There is injustice in cutting off this relationship. Though he yearns for more, Moses does not presume to ask to lead the people across the border. Perhaps he recognizes that for this he is not sufficient. He only wants to see the goodness of the land.

God's response is ironic. God tells Moses to climb up to an observation point from which he indeed can see—but not touch, feel, smell, hold, turn in his own hands, taste the fruit or be nourished by the produce. For Moses, the land of Israel becomes the unattainable. Judged unworthy to enter the land, Moses dies and bequeaths to us an enduring consciousness of exile. Perhaps God's relationship with Moses had climaxed and could not contain the added intensity that would result from consummation in physical sacred space. Or, perhaps God could not bear for Moses to experience the pain of disillusionment in the new process. He was gathered up into God, the Infinite "Place."<sup>3</sup> What are the implications of the passage in Deuteronomy for the meaning of Israel as a sacred spatial palace?

Beginning with Moses, Jewish tradition increasingly and exceedingly mythologizes the land of Israel. Moses' last prayer institutes the unattainability of Israel, inspiring the petition that is a formal part of Jewish daily liturgy: "Gather us from our dispersion and lead us upright to our land." Every generation of the Jewish people since the first exile has been repeating Moses' prayer—in liturgy and also in literature, music, and imagery—asking to be brought out of the state of exile into the redemptive homeland. However, having been utterly vanquished by Rome, return to the material land in political or military terms seemed an impossible project for the Jewish people. The unattainability of Israel was indispensable to a Diaspora concept of desiring the sacred. Yearning for Israel became a metaphoric act, as the Jewish people detached its national aspirations, hopes, and visions of fulfilling its promised destiny from the geography of Israel. The benefit was that we avoided the risk of failure; we remained on the other side of the Jordan. Life in Israel would demand different qualities, a new process

of putting into practice what had only been theorized in the desert. Israel became a dream, the redemption place that God will reveal, a palace that does not exist in space.

From the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E. until the modern period, the Jewish people has not had secure autonomy in the promised land. Alienated from our romanticized Jewish body and our sacred work of the earth of the Promised Land, the Jewish people invested tremendous resourcefulness and creativity in study and prayer. From the conclusion of the mishnaic period onward, studying texts and praying became equivalent to doing the sacred acts affiliated with the land of Israel. The creative imagination of the talmudic sages animated the seasons and agricultural work of the distant, inaccessible land, translating them into a new form of service. Redacted after the second destruction of Jerusalem, the Talmud dedicates a tremendous proportion of its massive corpus to explicating the sacred practices of the Temple and re-conceiving the sacred service in Jerusalem as one of the principle structures of the religious life of the Jewish people in exile. The rabbis reconstruct a Jerusalem that organizes an abstract spatial theory of sacred life. The conceptual motion of the Jewish people from the periphery to the core is orchestrated according to the fertile process of the land and its harvest cycle. In the talmudic imagination, Jews still carry baskets laden with their first fruits, tithes and offerings, sacrificial gifts and atonements; they participate in pouring libations, waving offerings, contributing donations, bathing their bodies, circling with their dead and burying them outside the walls.<sup>4</sup> The Temple is the idealized locus for family and communal connection, auspicious gathering, supplication, and celebration. In constant relation to an unearthly Jerusalem, the Jewish people express its shared identity and experiences collective union with its Creator.

Replacing the functions and concepts of the Temple has the same advantages as disadvantages. Sacred service came to be affiliated with keeping our hands clean, with an increased aloofness from the material world. The materials, grounded in the land of Israel, of offering and sacrifice, earth, animal, and fruit, and the daily agricultural, social, and political processes that enabled their celebration nearly vanished from our sacred repertoire. In the post-Temple era, the houses of worship and study and the private homes of the dispersed nation became the ritual centers, the sanctuaries of the Jewish Diaspora. In the observance of commandments, the sanctification

of the Sabbath and festivals, Jews attained a non-spatial territory where one could abide in the infinite divine expanse.

In his famous 1951 essay, “The Sabbath,” Abraham Joshua Heschel concretized sacred Jewish religious experience as quintessentially temporal: “The Seventh day is a palace in time which we build. It is made of soul, of joy and reticence.”<sup>5</sup> For Heschel, time is not the fearsome opponent that heralds triumphant mortality. Rather, it stands for and contrasts with space, the domain of power, control, acquisition, and labor, where perceptions of material substance blind us from apprehending that which is first sanctified, time. In the temporal domain, Shabbat concretizes the absent Temple. Heschel apprehends the infinite spiritual presence of the divine in, or perhaps more aptly, during Shabbat. Accessible weekly, Shabbat resists political hegemonies that circumscribe Jewish autonomy, thus fueling the fervent hope for redemption. On Shabbat, we enter both sacred space and sacred time, for our homes and synagogues replace the Temple; fields become the intimate dwelling spaces of holy presence, the divine bride and queen. Shabbat is a gateway between our Diaspora sanctuaries and the otherworldly realms to which we aspire, beyond both space and time. Shabbat is at the cusp of the material world with eternity.

Heschel’s view epitomizes a Western philosophical tradition immortalized by Kant that asserts time as a supreme, *a priori*, internal, independent condition of existence.<sup>6</sup> He was inspired by the traditions of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, a rabbinic approach that sustains and justifies a disembodied Jewish identity.<sup>7</sup> Emerging from a cave where he had hidden from the Romans for twelve years during the Bar Kokhba revolt, Bar Yohai expresses his loathing of the material world. He finds consolation in an old person’s spiritual commitment to greet the Shabbat queen with fragrant myrtle (BT *Shabbat* 33b). The old person, claims Heschel, represents the Jewish people ever uplifted by observing Shabbat. It is the Shabbat that justifies material existence and sustains hope and purpose when history defies both.

For Heschel, the Jewish people’s relationship to the spatial realm had been fraught with difficulty for more than two thousand years. Jewish sources explicitly attribute the loss of autonomy and the destruction of the Temples to “senseless hatred” among us and corruption of our political and religious leadership. We had failed to meet the challenge posed by inhabiting our sacred space. Heschel’s intentional substitution of the grandeur of time



for the limits of space conveyed a sublime message about Shabbat. It also inscribed a Diaspora-oriented, temporal theology just as the modern State of Israel was at the foundling stage. Harboring a tinge of discontent with the lasting destruction, he nonetheless expresses profound affirmation of Diaspora living.

Zion is in ruins, Jerusalem lies in the dust. All week there is only hope of redemption. But when the Sabbath is entering the world, [hu]man is touched by a moment of actual redemption. (p. 68)

“Actual redemption,” for Heschel, is achieved by withdrawing from space into the sanctuary of time. We make a “pilgrimage to the seventh day” (p. 90).

We usually think that the earth is our mother, that time is money and profit our mate. The seventh day is a reminder that God is our father, that time is life and the spirit our mate. (p. 76)

According to Heschel in his 1951 phase, space is irredeemable at worst, tolerable at best. Time, however, partakes of the holy. “We share time, we own space” (p. 99). Whereas God sanctifies the holiness of Shabbat, the holiness of the land of Israel derives from the holiness of the people of Israel (p. 82).

While Heschel’s explicit intention was to inspire Shabbat experience, his space-time, mother-father binaries suggest a problematic and persistent gendered dualism. Privileging an unearthly “father,” time, over a material, corruptible “mother,” place, debases the emerging, embodied Israel at the critical moment of achieving statehood. Mother, the land, is subject to the corruption of power, whereas Father, time, is immune from the seductions of material. These enduring attributions need to be interrogated. The claim of the immunity of time encourages detachment from space, often characterized by inhospitable political-material conditions of persecution and poverty. Heschel’s approach idealizes the escape into time, the father, while Zionism addresses untenable material conditions by drawing upon the idealized Jewish relationship to space, the mother. Sacred space, while wholly corruptible, is also the medium for revolutionary, even redemptive change.

Engaging the material for the purposes of sanctification is not new to Judaism. During millennia of exile, while the material realm has often been a place of disempowerment and oppression, Jews—contrary to the position

of Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai—have not usually pursued an ascetic escape. In the daily practice of Jewish ritual and social responsibilities, Judaism affirms embodied expressions of holiness, sanctifying our this-worldly lives through attention to and use of materials. Even in exile, Jews use earthly materials for the purpose of sanctification: Wine, bread, binding leather straps, fabric wrappings, menstrual blood, water, oil, ink, beautiful fruit, vessels, shoes, and spices are incorporated into ritual acts that sanctify daily and festive Jewish life. Indeed, materials used in sacred acts represent and sustain the palpable and vital connection between holiness and earth, nourishment, temporal cycles, and even sacred space. The un-allegorized redemption through liberatory acts in this lifetime, the striving with material to express *kedushah*, holiness, is a constant theme of Jewish text and life. Judaism interweaves sex, ethics, business, politics, law, agriculture, poverty, oppression, and supernal ecstasy, exhorting us to perform divine purposes in this world through ritual and social commandments, activating our embodied selves. Our critique, our pain, our desire are all acknowledged and addressed by the minutiae and general principles of *halakhah* and *aggadah*, by the vast and varied literatures of our people. Judaism works in this historical present. Not accepting that our social, economic, political conditions are necessary, essential, or divinely ordained, Jews often strive toward redemptive action. We are rooted in and committed to improving the conditions of life in corporeal space.

Later in his life, Heschel himself achieved a profound apprehension of Israel, the modern state. He recorded his own testimonies. Visiting the united city of Jerusalem, Heschel experienced the sanctity of space:

At first I fainted. Then I saw: a wall of frozen tears, a cloud of sighs. . . . The Wall. The old mother crying for all of us. Stubborn, loving, waiting for redemption. . . .

The Wall. No comeliness to be acclaimed, no beauty to be relished. But a heart and an ear. Its very being is compassion. You stand still and hear; stones of sorrow, acquaintance with grief. We all hide our faces from agony, shun the afflicted. The Wall is compassion, its face is open only to those smitten with grief. . . .

Silence. I embrace the stones. I pray: “O Rock of Israel, make our faith strong and your words luminous in our hearts and minds. No image. Pour holiness into our moments.” Once you have lived a moment at the Wall, you never go away.<sup>8</sup>

Standing before the *Kotel*, the Western Wall, Heschel senses the eternity of space, the embodiment of spirit, the power of material symbol. He poetically melds the fiery lightness of word with the unbearable heaviness of stone. Yet, he claims, it is available only to those “smitten with grief,” those who know the agony of the path which the remnant of the Jewish people has trodden to that remnant of our sacred place. “Pour holiness into our moments,” he implores, for he recognizes the precariousness of our mortal position in space, the newness of his sacred moment transpiring in sacred territory. Heschel’s powerful declarations of the impact of Israel on his own experience record a precious awe at the miracle of national autonomy of the Jewish people in our promised homeland, the emergence from the fires of Europe, the a-historical possibility, the truth of the imaginary.

What is the meaning of the State of Israel? Its sheer being is the message. . . . Israel is a personal challenge, a personal religious issue. It is a call to every one of us as an individual, a call which one cannot answer vicariously.<sup>9</sup>

Heschel’s generation witnessed the greatness of European culture wreaking utter desecration. The meaning of Israel as “sheer being” expressed gratitude for relief; hope was for the end of grief. But now, having counted 36 years since the reunification of Jerusalem during Israel’s modern statehood, we need to re-conceive what it might mean for Israel to be “a palace in space.” My analysis of sacred space as idealized and unattainable destination, concentric enclosures, and erotic medium for a loving covenant have important implications for the development of Israel.

One of the main barriers to realizing the palace is the cumulative effect of living in exile, where sacredness is detached from the land. Whereas Diaspora space often signified dispossession, limit, and constraint, Israel struggles to actualize the redeemed space that had been rendered an impossible abstraction, a concept, an ideal. But the fervent commitment inscribed by the idealized sacred geography of Israel is being actualized to justify violent claims of entitlement. The biblical promise to the Israelites established monotheism in the spiritual geography of humankind. Interpretation of the exclusivity of territorial monotheism, however, brought the concomitants of intolerance, of commandments to demolish the sacred items of others and to “utterly destroy” polytheistic peoples wherever they are encountered.<sup>10</sup> Christianity,

suggests Eisenzweig, allegorized redemption, compared with the Jewish territorial covenant. Palestine is a “territoire occupé de l’imagination juif,” a territory occupied by the Jewish imagination.<sup>11</sup>

Modern Zionists recaptured Jewish imagination with a compelling re-visioning of the actuality of homeland, and of Jew as settler and builder. Jews possessed and mastered the land: drained the swamps, managed irrigation, made the desert bloom, re-forested. Intensifying the male-gendered pioneer image, an Israeli warrior-hero identity has grown. Israeli military identity draws strength from standing in opposition to the passive, objectified figure of the Diaspora Jew; Israeli machismo portrays a transformation of the Jew from emasculated, pallid, displaced person to robust, hearty cultivator of the earth, conquistador.<sup>12</sup> For many Jews today, Israel has come to represent an untenable military occupation that endangers the moral and spiritual ethos of the Jewish people. Is it possible to engage in the struggle toward redemption using the tools of an unredeemed world?<sup>13</sup>

Following Heschel’s own tradition of radical activism and dedication to humanity, we are liberationists, and Heschel, who knew how to “pray with his legs” on his Selma march alongside Martin Luther King, was one of our inspirations. The liberation idea motivated the rebirth of the Jewish people in the State of Israel and powered the attainment of the physical land. However, at this historical moment, as embattled aggressors in the holy land, the full attainability of Israel as our sacred home seems as remote as if we stood with Moses on the other side of the Jordan.

Heschel instructed us well about our role in actualizing liberation yearnings. From my feminist perspective, the holiness of Israel is less about entitlement to a deed and more about a difficult process of attaining the unattainable, entering, receiving, and activating the sacred body of the Jewish People. Life in Israel demands a new willingness to put into practice what we hope and imagine, under extraordinarily challenging conditions. The land of Israel is not only “being,” to use Heschel’s phrase. Existence, accomplished by draining swamps, surviving disease, and subsisting, occupied the first half-century of Israeli state-building. Now we need to focus on the processes of “becoming.” If Israel is a medium for God and the people to live in the evolving presence of one another, our critical attention now must shift toward the quality of our presence and our actions, the methods by which we work out and fulfill sacredness.

The space of Israeli discourse and the public domains of religion, work,

and government have been dominated by male-gendered territoriality and militarism. Might we not benefit from a change in emphasis toward the implicit connection of material action with what is associated with the female? Parental functions—nurture, care-giving, social and communal service, and the empowerment of healthy and sustainable living—are too often gendered female, diminished, and marginalized. These activities are, however, affiliated with the sublime and difficult work of the divine Creator. They need to be undertaken jointly by men and women, disconnected from the dualism of the gender-fixated culture that privileges a hard and violent masculinity. To fulfill our sacredness, it is not sufficient for us to conquer or occupy space. Indeed, though Heschel once claimed that we own space, the land is God's. We must cohabit the palace in a manner fit for sacred partnership. The holiness of Israel is inextricable from the holiness of our conduct.

A “palace in time” is an oxymoron. It displaces space to assert the priority of time. I advocate the reassertion of the spatial dimension of Heschel's palatial architecture, the activities of sacredness that we perform with our bodies, our institutions, our agriculture, our aesthetic, our environment. Indeed, God our mother is bound up with our father. By building the Israeli palace in space, we not only pray for but also enact the unity of the Holy One, the *Shekhinah* with her mate, the return of the divine and human presence from exile.

Like Moses, I yearn for the intimacy of the connection which Israel affords, a connection that we now have the potential to express when we birth, bless covenants, make schools, do business, prepare elections, render court judgments, give charity, sing music, as well as dig the earth, cultivate it, and consume its produce. Yet the historical attainment of our “unattainable” destination, the national sovereignty of the Jewish people, did not constitute the fulfillment of our destiny; we continue to long.

The Chief Rabbinate expressed a refined formulation of the new condition of Jewish consciousness about Israel: “the initial flowering of our redemption.” Redemption is a process involving a fusion of our longing for what Israel had grown to symbolize in our private and shared visions with our experience of a nation-state that exists in space and time. We need to adjust our conceptions of both heaven and earth, using the mechanisms of family and community, faith, culture, economics, politics, religion, and law, the tools of humanity. Our adjustments must seek to capture the vibrant texts

and life of our pluralist Jewish spirit in everyday Israeli society. Vision alone will not suffice. Having crossed into the boundaries of our sacred space, we entered into intense responsibility; we, the children of Jacob, must wrestle through the night and work through the day to realize our visions.

At 55, Israel has completed the first cycle of jubilee. According to the Torah, the fiftieth is a year of emancipation, restoration, and rest for the land. Having struggled ourselves, we now face the fervent and zealous longing of the Palestinian people for their emancipation. In our day, a new generation of women peace activists has arisen. These voices are particularly heterogeneous; the initiators are primarily newcomers to public activity. Most have been propelled into the public arena, mobilizing themselves and others to protest against unnecessary risks and dangers, prevent avoidable disaster, and refocus attention and energy on the value of human life and the need to bring an end to conflict.<sup>14</sup> While Israelis experience extreme fear and unconscionable violation during this current Intifada, some Palestinian feminists perceive the Israeli occupation as akin to the male occupation of women's lives in society.<sup>15</sup> How can we nurture bold sisterhood partnerships that deconstruct violent territoriality, respect the sanctity of life, and attain power to liberate us from violence?

The State of Israel affords the first opportunity to work out the arrangements for a Jewish society that embodies competing, even contradictory claims about the principles, institutions, symbols, and rituals of social, political, legal, and religious practice. No formula will guarantee our desired outcomes, or our security. And so, despite this chance to enact a spiritual Zionism, we mostly hover at the cusp, at the boundary of dream and the possible. Some hesitate, some resist, some deny, some grope, some plead, some strive, and some complain, as did the Israelites in the desert. Our commitment to strive for ethical behavior is tested in the presence of power and danger. The fulfillment of the continuous longing for Israel as consummation of the divine covenant is a subtle and ongoing process. We must demonstrate our worthiness to inhabit the land through profound spiritual commitment and responsibility to continuously enact our most inspired humanity and vision, our most loving, intense compassion, with each other, with our partners and opponents, and with divine Creation.

One of the ways I have engaged the spiritual, political, and social complexity of fulfilling my own spiritual visions of Israel is through initiating and sustaining a grass-roots change project, "Women of the Wall." For fourteen

years we have been educating the Israeli judiciary, the Knesset, the media, and communities about religious practice that affirms the role of women in sacred space and unites the voices of all streams of Judaism. Rather than “wailing” in the despair of exile, Women of the Wall implement a celebratory vision of homecoming for the Jewish people. In spite of vicious violations of the sanctity of the space adjoining the Wall and of our bodies and souls during prayer, we persist to initiate hundreds of Jews into an ennobling practice. The Wall is the symbolic nexus of the gathering of the Jewish people, a fulcrum of Jewish consciousness and a gateway to the “palace in space.” Changes that transpire there empower the processes of change throughout the Jewish world and in other religious traditions. The extreme fervor people exercise at the *Kotel* is a post-modern expression of diverse spiritual visions that are many, strong, and sometimes mutually exclusive.

Women of the Wall have lifted the androcentric veil through which people have been viewing the Western Wall plaza. We have revealed some of the coercive violence latent in texts and actions that assert territoriality as a model for the (mis)management of sacred space. This domination process marginalizes and subordinates women and the “emasculated” practitioners of Judaism who are not ultra-Orthodox. In place of the mournfulness, invisibility, and silencing to which women have previously acquiesced at the *Kotel*, Women of the Wall are introducing joyous enactments and interpretations of religious texts, visibly and palpably. As a result of our efforts, the Supreme Court has affirmed that there are different legitimate forms of religious expression, which need to coexist.

In Israel, unlike in the Diaspora, Jewish religious activism has an interface with the constitutive institutions of society. Women of the Wall demonstrate a compelling process of social change to render spiritual visions more attainable. The struggle for women’s active visible and audible participation in the sacred domain of the *Kotel* has exposed the violent intensity of the male territorial paradigm of conquest and possession. Shabbat in Jerusalem’s sacred space has and continues to be similarly violently contested.

I exhort the Jewish People to persevere, to reinterpret and intensify our commitment to the sacredness of Israel. Israel asserts the attainability of dream and spiritual vision, while revealing the challenge to the core of our humanity to engage in fulfillment. Even knowing that Israel struggles informs and strengthens our own resolve to render our dreams in the daily experience of our lives. Heschel wrote,



“Jerusalem, our hearts went out to you whenever we prayed, whenever we pondered the destiny of the world. For so many ages we have been lovesick. My beloved is mine, and I am his, Jerusalem whispered. We waited unbearably long, despite frustration and derision.”

In our own days, the miracle occurred. . . . How shall we live with Jerusalem? She is a queen demanding high standards. . . . What is the mystery of Jerusalem? A promise: peace and God's presence. . . . Jerusalem is a recalling, an insisting, a waiting for the answer to God's hope.

No longer waiting, nor recalling, Israel is past, present, and most of all, the process of attaining the possible, and even the impossible.

Galah of Minsk, an eighteenth-century composer of Yiddish prayers of supplication, longed for redemption in the land of Israel, not unlike Moses. She wrote:

It should not surprise you that I must work,  
The soft and delicate daughter of Israel  
has long been in exile. . . .  
We shout and beg God all year long,  
When will our prayers finally come before God?<sup>16</sup>

I, too, yearn, but unlike Galah, I am neither soft nor delicate. I am strong and toughened by the experience of immigration, by the unrelenting sun, the dry rock face, by the work of contributing to the possibility of redemption, by bearing four sons in Jerusalem. I have felt the surge of history from deep beneath me, pulsing through me, urging me. I taste the sweet hint, the flavor of what might be. I invoke our most exalted integrity in our effort to transform the dream of Israel from an unattainable object of our longing, to a spiritual-material state in which we actualize our visions with the earth and stone of sacred space, with the blood and sweat of our most sacred being.

Heschel observes that our resemblance to God's image is fading rapidly. The Jewish people needs to be exalted by our goals. “We look to the Sabbath as our homeland, as our source and destination” (p. 30). Heschel wrote metaphorically, yet his metaphor was spatial. Let us resolve to wrestle with the sanctity of space and material without capitulating to the machismo of territorial possessiveness that fuels conquest, conflict, and draws blood. May we engage collaboratively in the sacred labor of building our “Palace in Space.”



Notes

1. In 538 B.C.E. Jews returned to Israel from the Babylonian exile; in 164 B.C.E., the Hasmoneans attained a measure of political and religious autonomy; and in 1948, the Jewish people again proclaimed spatial hegemony over Israel as our homeland.
2. See my essay, "The Yom Kippur *Avodah* Within the Female Enclosure," in Judith Kates and Gail Reimer (eds.), *Beginning Anew: A Woman's Companion to the High Holy Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), pp. 243–257.
3. *Makom*, Place, is one of the Jewish names for the divine.
4. For example, much of the content of the orders of *Moed*, Appointed Times, *Kodashim*, Holy Things, and *Tohorot*, Purities—for which there is only one tractate in the Talmud—are concerned with temple function.
5. Abraham J. Heschel, *The Sabbath* (Canada: Harper Collins, 1995; first edition, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951), pp. 13–14.
6. Time is "the condition of the relations to be found in sensible things, it is conceived prior to any sensation; it is not a sensory, but a *pure intuition*." Immanuel Kant, "Inaugural Dissertation," *Theoretical Philosophy, 1755–1770* (English transl. and ed. David Walford; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 392).
7. Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai similarly rejects labor as a worthwhile pursuit, idealizing the condition in which others attend to our crops and needs (BT *Berakhot* 35b).
8. A.J. Heschel, *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity: Essays* (ed. Susannah Heschel; New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), pp. 283–285.
9. *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (second edition, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), pp. 224–225.
10. Ex. 23:22–24; 34:13–16. Cf. Frederick W. Turner, *Beyond Geography: The Western Spirit Against the Wilderness* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1983), p. 45.
11. Uri Eisenzweig, *Territoires occupés de l'imaginaire juif: Essai sur l'espace sioniste* (Paris: C. Bourgois, 1980).
12. Daniel Boyarin is a vocal exponent of this conception. He considers the Diaspora identity to have been rendered effeminate by modern Zionists. See his *Carnal Israel: Reading Sex in Talmudic Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
13. See Audre Lorde's discussion of the master's tools dismantling the master's house in *Sister Outsider* (Freedom, Ca.: Crossing Press, 1984).
14. A sampling of initiatives: Women against War, Mothers and Women for Peace, Women in Black, Jerusalem Link: Bat Shalom—The Jerusalem Women's Action Center and Marcaz al-Quds la I-Nissah—the Jerusalem Center for Women, Women for the Sanctity of Life, Coalition of Women for a Just Peace, Isha L'Isha (Woman

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to Woman) Feminist Center, Nisan Young (Jewish and Arab) Women Leaders, The Bridge: Jewish and Arab Women for Peace in the Middle East.

15. Orly Halpern, "A Time and Place for Them," *Ha'aretz English Edition*, October 23, 2002.

16. Rivkah Zakutinsky (ed.), *Techines: A Voice From the Heart* (Brooklyn: Aura Printing, 1999).