Cultic Holiness and its Moral Content in the Old Testament

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Commonly the word 'holy' is understood to have an ethical import and it is used consistently to convey the idea of moral purity or complete goodness. But the Old Testament concept of holiness is complex including within it several interrelated ideas, the holiness of Yahweh being understood not as one of his attributes but as his essential nature or as the sum of all his attributes.

Included in the concept are, broadly speaking, two main notions. The first is the notion of the power of Yahweh, his glory and his awesomeness. One might call this aspect of holiness the 'otherness' or the 'Unapproachableness' of Yahweh. Related to this idea is the other aspect of holiness which lays emphasis on one's submission and obedience to Yahweh's will, and thus carries with it the idea of goodness, wholeness and integrity. That which is remote and mysterious in the former notion presents itself as near and 'fascinating' in the latter notion. 'For thus says the high and lofty One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and humble spirit"' (Isaiah 57:15).

It is too much of a generalization to assume that the concept of awesome holiness is that of the priestly tradition, and the ethical holiness is the product of the prophetic teachings, or to say that the former belonged to the early stages of the religious life of Israel and the latter to a more advanced stage of faith. Both emphases are found in the various traditions of the Old Testament literature, and both notions belong to all major periods of the history of the people. Hänel's[1] attempt to equate different aspects of the idea of holiness with different chronological periods in Israel's religious history is best challenged by Ringgren's findings in his study of the prophetic understanding of holiness:

> There is no essential difference between the prophets and for instance the books of the law as to the conception of

[1] D. J. Hänel, *Die Religion der Heiligkeit*, (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1931). In the book he traces five stages of development in the concept, namely inaccessible holiness (pre-patriarchal period), holiness of majesty (time of the patriarchs), jealous-holiness (characteristic of Mosaic Religion), holiness of perfection (time of the prophetic ministry), and holiness of otherness of transcendence—'Jenseitheiligkeit' (post-exilic period).

holiness. The prophets obviously accepted the cultic notion of holiness as it is preserved to us in the ritual laws of the Pentateuch.[2]

A. The Elemental Meaning of QDŠ

A word may have in the early stage of the language, culture and religion of a people, a particular connotation which may not be significant at a later stage of their development. What is the original notion underlying the usage of QDŠ by the Hebrews and the Semites[3] cannot be recovered now. However, this may not be a serious lack in one's understanding of the usage of the word in the Old Testament.

In the consideration of the original meaning of the word scholars have suggested mainly two different possibilities. One possibility is based on the study of the Babylonian word *quddushu* which is equivalent to *ellu* and which means 'bright', 'pure', or 'clear'.

This idea is held by scholars like Gesenius, Zimmern, Dillman, Cheyne and Kohler.[4] Vriezen says: 'The most plausible meaning seems to be "brilliant", so that men cannot behold it.'[5]

But the other possibility is strongly suggested by Baudissin[6] who finds in roots beginning with QD, GD or ḤD, the idea of piercing, cutting or separating. To him, QDŠ always conveyed the meaning of separation. Ringgren[7] admits that it seems impossible to produce a decisive argument for either of these opinions. After a careful examination of the use of the word in various Semitic languages he concludes that 'this investigation proves that the idea of withdrawal or separation is not always prominent, and the meaning "pure" also deserves attention . . .'[8]

The idea of separation is, however, generally accepted by most scholars today. Snaith[9] holds that the Babylonian usage of the word *quddush* had first to do with the gods, and only secondarily came to mean 'bright', because of the association of

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[2] Helmer Ringgren, *The Prophetical Conception of Holiness* (Uppsala: Lundequistska, 1948), p. 18. Cf. 'I do not wish to argue that Israelitic religion was something static and unalterable; of course there have been changes and developments in the course of time, but the notion of holiness seems to have been surprisingly constant.' *Ibid.*, p. 30.

[3] Procksch contends that the word is of Canaanite origin and that the Hebrews adopted it. Otto Procksch, 'Agiois', *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), I, 89.

[4] Norman H. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1944), p. 24.

[5] Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 149, note 2.

[6] W. W. G. Baudissin, 'Der Begriff der Heiligkeit im Alten Testament', *Studien zur semitischen Religionsgeschichte*, Hoft II, (Leipzig: Grunow, 1878), pp. 20-21.

[7] Ringgren, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[9] Snaith, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

the gods with the heavenly bodies in the later periods, and that the root originally meant 'separation'. To Eichrodt[10] the term QDŠ 'about which there is not a great deal more to be discovered etymologically' should probably be derived from the word QD (to cut), and the word indicates that which is 'marked off, separated, or withdrawn from ordinary use'. To Muilenburg[11] 'the more elemental meaning of the word seems to lie with "separation"'. The sanctuary, or sacred place, which was forbidden to laymen was called MQDŠ or HQDŠ QDŠYM or QDŠWT were prostitutes set apart for service in the heathen temples (Deut. 23:18; Hos. 4:14). In the Tamar story, she is called QDŠH (Gen. 38:21), though the usual Hebrew word for harlot (ZWNH) is also used (Vs. 15).

The significance of the idea of separation in QDS may be understood also by the main import of three other words of the same category, namely ḤRM, NZR and ḤL. MḤR refers to something which is wholly withdrawn from common use and is completely devoted to Yahweh. The devoted objects may also be called 'most holy' or 'doubly holy' things, (Lev. 27:28). The verb root NZR means 'to dedicate' or 'to separate' (Lev. 15:31; Hos. 9:10). The usage of its noun form is found in the statement 'He (a Nazarite) is holy to Yahweh all the days of his separation, NZRW (Num. 6:8).

ḤL meaning profaneness or commonness is the antonym of 'holy'. That which belongs to the sphere of men is ḤL or profane. The distinction is clearly made by Abimelech in his words to David: 'I have no common (ḤL) bread at hand, but there is holy bread' (1 Sam. 21:5).[12] Ezekiel complains how the priests have profaned the holy things, and made no distinction between the holy and the common (22:26), but the priests of the future temple would teach the difference between them (Ez. 44:23; cf. Lev. 10:10). In the regulations concerning the fruits of the newly planted trees it is stated in the Holiness Code that the fruits of the first three years were to be banned from any use for God or man; the fourth year fruit was to be holy to Yahweh and given to him as a thank-offering; and in the fifth year the fruit became 'common' and was ready to be used by men (Lev. 19:23–25).

The concept of 'separation' or the nature of 'being set-apart' has to do with the difference in God and man. QDŠ refer to what belongs to God, or what is myterious and extraordinary, and thus it indicates the supernatural and the superrational, the supernatural world being, to a Hebrew, as real as the natural

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[10] W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, Vol. 1, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), p. 270.

[11] J. Muilenburg, 'Holiness', *The Interpreters' Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. G. A. Bultrick *et. al.* (New York: Abingdon, 1962) II, 617.

[12] Ancient Hittite laws prohibiting the appropriation of sacred loaves by the lay people. *Ancient New Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard (Princeton, 1955), p. 208.

world. While much of the Hebrew concept of holiness is shared by the rest of the Semites, only of the latter, in general, and not of the Old Testament faith, one can say as W. R. Smith[13] does, 'Indeed the holiness of gods is an expression to which it is hardly possible to attach a definite sense apart from the holiness of their physical surroundings.'

In the Hebrew faith, the whole process worked in reverse. If separation from the sphere of the ordinary should make a thing or person holy the unclean thing, a leper, or a corpse, would have been considered 'holy'. The emphasis in the conception of holy, is that a person or a thing is separated *to* God, rather than separated *from* that which is common.[14] In respect to the meaning of QDŠ one must think of God first, and man or things second, and not the other way around. Things were considered separate because they were holy, and not vice versa. It is a positive concept, and not a negative one.

B. The 'Contagiousness' of Holiness

Connected with the concept of separation is the idea of the contagious character of holiness. The articles in the tabernacle were considered to be 'most holy' and whoever touched them became holy. 'Whatever touches the altar shall become holy' (Ex. 29:37). So also all other utensils of the tent (Ex. 30:26–29). Whoever would touch the holy Mountain of Sinai was not to be touched by anyone else, but to be put to death by stoning or shooting (Ex. 19:13).

The flesh and cereal offerings made to Yahweh were holy, so also those who contacted them (Lev. 6:11). The garment on which the blood offering was sprinkled was to be washed off in a holy place (Lev. 6:20; also Lev. 16:23-24). If the flesh was boiled in an earthen vessel, it was to be broken, presumably the holiness of the flesh having penetrated into it through its pores; and if a bronze vessel was used, it was to be scoured and rinsed in water (Lev. 6:21). Ezekiel, in his vision of the future temple, finds at the quarters of the priests 'a place where they boil or bake that which is offered to God' in order not to bring them out into the outer court and so communicate holiness to the people (Ez. 46:20).

The same concern is seen in the arrangement of the camps of Israel. To protect the secular tribes from their proximity to holiness, the Levites camped around the tabernacle; and around them, at a safe distance from the tabernacle, lived the common people (Num. 1:47–54). Ex. 33:7 has the tent pitched 'outside the camp, far off from the camp' for the same reason. Any of the sons of Aaron who touched the holy things while in uncleanness was commanded to be cut off (Lev. 22:3).

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[13] W. R. Smith, *The Religion of the Semites*, 1st ed., 1889 (New York: Meridian 1956) p. 141.

[14] Snaith, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

One ought to understand the Old Testament concept of the contagiousness of holiness on the basis of the fact that the Hebrews conceived of the soul and the body, and also man and nature, in closer relationship than we do. Pedersen[15] in his extensive study in this area points out that they did not make a distinction between soul and body as two fundamental forms of existence. Therefore the words 'flesh' and 'soul' are used interchangeably; 'The flesh is soul and, rather, the soul may be flesh'[16] so that body may be thought of as the outward form of the soul.[17]

One's heart or soul could not be holy without his flesh becoming holy. By the same token, one could not be unclean in soul without being so in his body, and vice versa. The physical phenomena connected with sex, like the issues from the sex organs, child-birth, sexual intercourse, etc. made a person unclean (Lev. 12:1–5; 1 Sam. 21:6). The laws of uncleanness caused by contact with the dead body were strictly enforced, and the purification ceremony was more elaborate in this case than in any other (Num. 19:11, 16; 31:19).

There existed a close interpenetration not only between one's soul and his body, but also between man and his land or property. The land can be called holy or unclean (Zech. 2:16; Amos 7:17). The land may be defiled by sexual offenses (Lev. 18:25–28; Jer. 3:2, 9) and particularly by bloodshed (Gen. 4:10–12; Num. 35:33). The land with all its living beings shared man's blessing or doom (Hos. 4:3; Jer. 12:4). In Gen. 3 the broken relationship between God and man caused a revolutionary disturbance in all of nature. A stone could be a witness to an event 'because it has heard all of the words of the Lord which he spoke to us' (Jos. 24:27).

It is in the context of this kind of thinking one should understand the belief that the ark, Mount Sinai, and the vessels of the sanctuary were filled with the divine holiness. These belonged to God and by association with him they acquired certain divine qualities. The violation of the holiness of any sacred thing, therefore, was a violation of Yahweh's holiness, and it incurred his sudden wrath and its destructive consequences.

These two major elements connected with the idea of holiness, namely separatedness and contagiousness, are also found in the common concept of 'taboo'.

C. Holiness and Taboo

It was a widespread belief among the people, this being true even today among the races of undeveloped culture, that certain things and people were charged with some mystic and supernatural

[15] Johs Pederson, *Israel, Its Life and Culture*, Vols. I–II (London: Oxford, 1926), pp. 171–81.

[16] Johs Pedersen, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

[17] The Biblical teaching of the resurrection of the body should be viewed in the light of this general concept of the Hebrews.

power. Trifling with them would mean incalculable danger, and casual contact with them was forbidden because their power revealed itself often in some unexpected manner. One's approach to them should fully rest upon one's full recognition of its power and potential danger. The things, times, persons, places or actions which were thus considered to be charged with power are commonly designated by the term 'taboo'.[18]

Man found himself in a sphere of powers whose 'modes of action transcend the ordinary and the incalculable, and dealings with these powers were conducted only at indefinite risk', and 'taboo but embodies the resolution to take no unnecessary risks of this indefinite kind'.[19] To Aldrich,[20] in its simplest form it is 'the instinctive avoidance of the unfamiliar from which a mystic danger is apprehended'.

One important characteristic of the idea of taboo is its contagiousness. Anything that comes in contact with the tabooed things or persons becomes a new danger. Taboo has an ambivalent character. It could be the seat of some mystic power or god, and therefore, is considered holy. Men avoided it lest it be defiled by them who are unprepared to handle it. At the same time the taboo could be unclean, and men avoided it lest they be defiled by it.

Thus the main characteristics of the concept were the ideas of some supernatural power residing in the taboo and the danger of taboo being transmitted to other things or persons by contact or sight.

In the uncivilized societies the elaborate system of taboo served as a basis for its social life. For example, the rights and privileges of the rulers, the priests and the leaders, were safeguarded; the weak, the women and the sick were protected; and the spread of contagious diseases was hindered. Taboo was to them like an unwritten socio-religious code; but many of them had no practical value as was learned from experience—for instance the belief that eating deer meat will make a man timid like a deer; or if a woman sits on a man's bed the man would lose his manly qualities; or if one steps over a fishing rod, arrow or gun, the weapon will lose its usefulness. The primitive mind inherently

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[18] The word was introduced into English by Captain Cook, having first met the word in 1777 at Tonga. R. R. Marett, 'Taboo', *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York, 1922) XII, 161. It is supposed to be derived from *ta* meaning 'to mark' and *pu*, an adverb of intensity. Thus the word means 'marked thoroughly.' Traces of the belief can be found in the rituals and the practices of higher religions.

J. G. Frazer has made an elaborate collection of the instances of taboo beliefs from all over the world in his extensive work, *Taboo and the Perils of the Soul* (The Golden Bough, 3rd ed., London: Macmillan, 1911), Vol. III.

[19] R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), p. 79.

[20] C. P. Aldrich, *The Primitive Mind and Modern civilization* (London: Kegan Paul, 1931), p. 107.

conceived of certain things as things that should not be done. The basis of taboo was not fundamentally rational or ethical. Even in the concept of sacred and unclean, the question of morality was not relevant.

The conception belongs to the perceptual stage of religion 'when values are massively apprehended without analysis of their grounds'.[21] At this stage, emotions of a collective order, especially the emotion of fear, were the chief factors which governed the social life. The unfamiliar, or the strange, was always feared, and taboo was often based on irrational fear.

Taboo laws, whatever might have been their original significance,[22] were understood by the Hebrews as the commands of a personal God and expressions of his will with respect to the religious life of his people. Thus the automatic and impersonal element in the conception of taboo, which was very common in the primitive religious, plays no part in the Hebrew faith.

Something of Yahweh was confronted in the ark, the tent, the holy days and the holy men. But his nature and his will transcended these. While his greatness, majesty and power were portrayed by the prophets by their teachings concerning his rule of the universe and his mighty acts in history, the cultic tradition understood them in terms of the basic principle that Yahweh is unapproachable and his character is inviolable. His nature is so different from that of man and what he can understand that there is an element of danger in it for man. This constant emphasis upon the complete and strict separation of God from man and his awesome unapproachableness is not only the distinctive feature of the cultic tradition, but it is one of its major contributions to the life of the Hebrews.[23]

One essential distinction between the concept of taboo and the Hebrew idea of holiness is that the latter has a strong positive content which is lacking in the former. Holiness becomes a danger, only when the rules of holiness are not followed. It is the holiness which threatened the life of Isaiah which purifies him and makes him a channel of blessings (Isa. 6). While taboo was a set of prohibitions concerning very many petty things, holiness in the Old Testament is always linked to the almighty God, which meant that it always has a content of his greatness and power.

While the taboo laws in general were haphazard, capricious, and often meaningless, the holiness laws were unified under one purpose, namely, the knowledge of the absolute lordship of

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[21] Marett, 'taboo', *op. cit.*, p. 183.

[22] W. R. Smith tries to explain how the Semitic laws of holiness and uncleanness show clear marks of their origin in a system of taboo. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 446–54.

[23] The understanding of the separation between God and man is basic to the understanding of Yahweh's ḤSD (covenant love) and his covenant with his people, especially the new covenant. The more complete and serious this separation is, the more meaningful and profound is the reconciliation brought through Christ. 'You who once were far off are brought nigh . . .' (Eph. 2:13).

Yahweh over the whole life of his people, and their obedience to his will. The cultic emphasis upon the personal element in the holy is obvious. This is what made the concept of holiness distinctive from the concept of taboo which is based on the fear of some unknown evil power.

D. The Fear of the Holy

Underlying the idea of holiness is the awareness of an inconceivable power, mysterious and different from what is familiar to man. 'Holiness is a force that is felt in all spheres of life, it is, indeed, at the root of all other kinds of energy.'[24] This power of holiness was always feared.

Holy objects were regarded with particular dread. Approach of them without the prescribed precautions meant fatal results. 'They are as dangerous to the uninitiated as the switchboard of an electrical power house might be to a child.'[25] But, unlike the live wires, the blessings or dangers related to the appropriation of holiness were not fixed or automatic. The holy things were instruments of danger or blessing, and it was always Yahweh who acted.

The holiness of a sacred object was based on the awesomeness and inviolability of Yahweh. The fear and dread of the holy situation was due to the presence in it of an all powerful and fearsome Person. That which was holy was something God-like, God-involved, and, therefore, it was feared.

Terrifying power was associated with Yahweh's manifestation of his holiness. Ezekiel proclaims how by mighty works of judgment among the nations God will 'vindicate the holiness of his great name' (36:21–24). He will, by pestilence, bloodshed and by torrential rain of hailstones and fire show his greatness and his holiness, and make himself known to many nations (38:22-23; cf. 20:41; 28:22–25; 39:27). Ezekiel's awareness of divine holiness is more awesome and more sublime and majestic, more cosmic and tremendous than that of his prophetic predecessors'.[26] When Yahweh is worshipped in his holiness one ought to tremble before him (Ps. 96:9) because he is terrible in his sanctuary (Ps. 68:36). To regard God as holy was to regard him as one's fear and dread (Isa. 8:13).

The belief that God could not be seen by man except at the cost of his life was due to the fear of his holiness (Ex. 19:21; 33:20–21; Judg. 6:22; 13:22). Jacob in his Bethel dream, realizing the sacredness of the place, 'was afraid and said, "How dreadful is this place"' (Gen. 28:17).

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[24] Pedersen, *op. cit.*, III-IV, p. 264.

[25] H. W. Robinson, *Religious Ideas of the Old Testament* (New York; Scribner's, 1913), p. 131.

[26] Muilenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 622.

To a Hebrew, this power was not some unknown perilous force, but the incomprehensible power of Yahweh.[27] All power was concentrated in this one Person, so no one else was to be feared. 'His name is holy and terrible' (Ps. 111:9; 99:3). 'There is none like him, majestic in holiness, dreadful in praises, doing wonders' (Ex. 15:11). The fear of the holy, thus, was the fear of Yahweh.

E. The Moral Content of Awesome Holiness

A clear-cut separation between the priestly and the prophetic traditions, and the idea that it is the prophetic teachings which transformed and raised the primitive Hebrew faith which they had in common with the Semitic races, cannot be substantiated. A study like that of Ringgren,[28] would lead one to say that it is an over-simplification to hold that 'holiness was raised to an ethical level and a spiritual significance through the teachings of the prophets'.[29]

A brief inquiry must be made now as to what is the moral basis of the awesome holiness, especially in the context of the cultic tradition.

Otto[30] tries to treat 'holiness' as a 'distinctive category', one that is unique and irreducible, and one that can only be experienced and not defined. He subtracts from the word 'holy' its derivative moral and rational content to isolate 'a clear overplus of meaning' that it has, which he calls the *numen*.[31] The *numen* is the '*mysterium tremendum*'. It arouses all the range of emotions, but primarily 'a holy dread' which is the starting point of all religions, and which is a sublime element in the higher levels of religions. It has various elements like awesome unapproachableness or 'otherness', absolute 'over-poweringness', which is the source of religious humility, and an energy which corresponds to what has developed into the idea of God as 'consuming fire' or 'consuming love' in mysticism.

One is not sure what is distinctively religious in Otto's *numen* or his 'holy.' Its 'otherness', 'over-poweringness', or energy

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[27] The association of the idea of holiness with that of fear and with God's power and judgment is continued through the inter-testamental period and into the New Testament. 'Then shall the kings and the mighty perish and be given into the hands of the righteous and holy' (Enoch 38:5; also 1:9; 48:9). 'Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy one of God' (Mk. 1:24). Receiving the Holy Spirit would be at the same time receiving power (Acts 1:8). The book of Revelation repeatedly speaks of God's holiness in relation to his power. 'Who shall not fear and glorify thy name, O Lord? For thou alone art holy' (Rev. 15:4; 3:7; 4:8).

[28] Ringgren, *op. cit.*

[29] Jacob Singer, *Taboo in the Hebrew Scripture* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1928), p. 86.

[30] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. J. W. Harvey (Oxford: University, 1936),

[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 5:7–12.

are true with many things man fears, even outside the realm of demons and capricious gods. A feeling of *mysterium tremendum* may be aroused by an extraordinary event or thing. If the distinctive feature of his 'Holy' is a unique combination of 'awesomeness' and 'fascination', it is equally true with Mt. Everest, the fearful unapproachableness of which is exactly what attracts men to it.

Otto explains the undeniable relation between holiness and morals by the theory of 'Schematization.' Similar to the psychological law of the association of ideas, in the realm of feeling one feeling arouses other corresponding feelings. Then casual connections turn into permanent associations. The non-rational numinous fact, schematized by rational and moral concepts, yields us 'the complex category of holy, itself, richly charged and complete in its fullest meaning'.[32] Otto successfully separates morality and holiness or the rational and the non-rational. But when he tries to relate them again, through his system of schematization of the holy, by the transference of ideas from other spheres, and that too, done through a period of time in the development of religion, one is not sure about the desirability and value inherent in the 'Holy'. Oman pronounces that 'the attempt to relate the rational to the non-rational[33] is the weakest part of the whole book, because what God has joined, being divided, is hard to put together again'.[34]

To Otto, the fundamental element in religion is one's 'creature-feeling', or 'self-disvaluation' in the presence of the Holy. When Isaiah has his inaugural vision, a self-depreciative feeling-response is aroused spontaneously. It is 'an immediate datum given with the feeling of the *numen* and it is not a moral depreciation, and 'the feeling is beyond question, not that of the transgression of the moral law'.[35] It is a feeling of absolute 'profaneness' and a 'judgment of self-depreciation, a judgment passed, not upon his character, because of individual "profane" actions of his, but upon his own very existence as creature before that which is supreme above all creatures'.[36]

When Otto understands sin as a 'numinous unworth' he does not explain whether one is to understand that it is from this sublime and most fundamental creature-feeling of Isaiah that he was delivered, when by the touch of the burning coal his guilt was taken away and his sin forgiven.

Otto speaks of the creature-feeling having in itself 'an immediate primary reference to an object outside of the self'[37] or again, he says 'the numinous is thus felt as objective and outside

[32] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. J. W. Harvey (Oxford: University, 1936).

[33] Cf. the subtitle of Otto's book, 'An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational'.

[34] John Oman, 'The Idea of the Holy' *Journal of Theological Studies* XXV (1923-24), p. 286.

[35] Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[36] *Loc. cit.*

[37] Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

the self'.[38] But is it inevitable that the numinous-feeling should have an objective reality?

The fundamental basis of the Hebrew faith was not the 'numinous state of mind' but the submission to the will of a Person who demanded from his people much more than mere awesome worship. Their fear of God was not a perpetual holy dread, but something which was the beginning of wisdom, a fear that was coupled with knowledge, and a fear of one who was known as their covenant God, their Redeemer, and their Lord. This is the characteristic which made the religion of the Hebrews distinctive among the faiths of their contemporaries, which were abounding in the fear of the holy, but which became morally degenerated to the lowest level.

Otto says:

> The venerable religion of Moses marks the beginning of a process which from that point onward proceeds with ever increasing momentum, by which 'the numinous' is throughout rationalized and moralized, i.e., charged with ethical import, until it becomes 'the holy' in the fullest sense of the word. The culmination of the process is found in the Prophets and in the Gospels. And it is in this that the special nobility of the religion revealed to us in the Bible is to be found . . .[39]

If there was not an inherent relation between the numinous and ethical, this process would not have been possible, for why should concepts of the two different spheres of Otto, namely, 'the holy' and 'the ethical', take this specific development of mutual union?

But the point is well taken so far as, and only so far as, Otto insists that the holy should not be identified with the perfectly good and that the concept of holiness has a content more than morality. This point of view is stated in its essence, even by Oman, who is an outspoken critic of Otto. He admits:

> In the oldest parts even of the Old Testament, ('holy') is used for what stirs a mysterious dread, a 'holy God' not meaning a God 'of purer eyes than to behold iniquity', but one apart and awe-inspiring. The more religious are primitive', the more the holy has to do with awe, and the less with moral reverence.[40]

To Ringgren, 'it is remarkable that the ethical aspect of holiness plays a very subordinate part in prophetic preaching', and 'ethical and moral ideas are never actually combined with the

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[38] Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
[39] *Ibid.*, p. 77.
[40] John Oman, *The Natural and the Supernatural* (Cambridge: University Press, 1931), p. 59.

word 'holy'.[41] Mowinckel holds that 'the word "holy" practically never has any ethical reference in the Old Testament'.[42]

One should remember that there has been a long historical development in the conception of 'holy' as in the case of the ideas of 'sin' or 'God'. If we find an aspect of holiness which in its immediate context appears neutral to the question of right and wrong as we understand morality, this aspect is something that the Hebrews shared with the rest of the Semitic world. The Hebrews understood rightness or wrongness of a thing in terms of its relation to God and its value to the welfare of their society, if not in terms of one's own understanding of them or his moral choice.

But many scholars in their zeal to free the 'holy' from the modern identification of it with the moral, fall into the danger of completely separating the two into two different spheres, as Otto does. They at the same time provide no basic reason why they came to be related in the prophetic religion or in the Gospels. To say that holiness came to have a moral content when the idea of God went through a development just pushes the question a step further back.

If by moral or ethical content is meant one's personal choice of oughtness in relation to certain set principles or standards, and thus sin is equated with moral evil and holiness with moral good, then, in the Hebrew concept of the 'holy' this content is not obvious. To a Hebrew, the moral value of holiness was not based upon value-judgment, but upon his relation to the Holy One. Thus, sin is a separation from God, and holiness one's relationship with him, and either is devoid of meaning in life if thought of entirely outside its moral content.

Taking the example of Isaiah's inaugural vision, again, if sin in question was purely the creature-feeling at the presence of the Holy,[43] or 'the human nature which cannot bear the encounter with the Being of higher order',[44] why the feeling of guilt and the cry for pardon instead of pure and sublime worship of awe and fear? On the other hand, if his sin was purely the transgression of some law, there is nothing inherently distressing about it, because a sinful act taken by itself could be quite advantageous and desirable to the transgressor. The guilt connected with sin always has to do with certain relationships. The most shattering awareness of sin comes to one when he becomes conscious of his separation from, and enmity against God, this being due to not so much his nature as a man as his morally depraved nature.

What one might today call 'moral life', the Hebrew termed 'a good life', or 'a life of wholeness', and what was meant always

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[41] Ringgren, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[42] Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (New York: Abingdon, 1954) p. 381.

[43] Otto, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

[44] F. Von Gall, *Die Herrlichkeit Gottes, eine Biblischtheologische untersuchung* (Giessen: A Töpelmann, 1900), p. 21.

was a life in harmony with the will and nature of Yahweh. This life was desired and lived always in the context of a community. Therefore, personal understanding and choice of moral values was generally lacking. God's will done as a community was the end of a good life.

> Holiness is *more* than healthy living in both the physical and moral sense. But healthy living in both these instances is especially capable of harmonizing with this 'more' whatever it may be. Since healthy living in both a physical and moral sense is especially the function of a person, then the implication seems to be that we should think of the 'more' too in personal terms.[45]

This is not to say that the Hebrew attempted to balance his desire to live in harmony with the holy God by his search to understand God's will in personal and moral terms. God's will was accepted as different in its very nature from man's will. For example, cultic laws were understood as the expressions of God's demands, and obeyed as such without question. A present day man may conclude that Israel's fear of touching the ark was nothing more than pure ignorance; but to them the issue in question was one's conformity to Yahweh's expressed will with respect to his inviolability, and in that given context there was something terribly personal and real in the obedience or disobedience of the same. The distinctive characteristic of the idea of holiness in the Old Testament, which gives it its moral content, is that it is always associated with Yahweh.

Hänel[46] points out that while the concept of holiness was predominant in all ancient Near Eastern religions, one unique characteristic of Israel's understanding of holiness was that it was fundamentally applied to God, while in other religions it was only very rarely associated with deity, but always with the cultic personnel or thing. Outside of Israel, the title 'holy gods' is seen for the first time in the inscription of Yechimilk of Byblos of the twelfth century B.C., and it is found in the writings of Eshmunazer of the fifth century B.C.; but 'nowhere is this term charged with a religious content comparable to what we discover in the Old Testament'.[47]

The notion of holiness is always related to Yahweh. Yahweh is called 'the holy God' (1 Sam. 6:20). 'Holy' is used as a synonym for 'Yahweh' (Isa. 40:25; Hos. 11:9; 3:3). Amos speaks of Yahweh swearing by his holiness, that is, by himself (4:2; cf. 6:8). One reads of his holy name (Ps. 105:3; Ezek. 36:20), his holy arm (Isa. 52:10), and his holy abode (Isa. 57:15).

In the book of Isaiah, God is often given the epithet 'the Holy One' or 'the Holy One of Israel', (1:4; 5:24; 31:1;

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[45] O. R. Jones, *The Concept of Holiness* (London: C. Allen and Unwin, 1961), pp. 105-6.

[46] Hänel, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.

[47] Jacob, *op. cit.*, p. 87, note 2.

40:25; 57:15—'his name is Holy'). It is to be noted that the epithet is often used in the context of his exaltedness (29:33), and his power as Creator (17:7) and as Redeemer (41:14; 49:7). The title is found also in Jeremiah (50:29; 51:5) and in certain Psalms (71:22; 78:41; 89:19).[48]

Yahweh's holiness was not a static otherness or separatedness from man, but it had a positive content. 'I will show myself holy among those who are near me' (Lev. 10:3). The positive aspect of holiness is often expressed in terms of his 'glory'. By his glory his people are sanctified (Ex. 29:43), and he imparts his holiness to whomsoever he chooses (Num. 16:7; Deut. 7:6; Ezek. 37:28; Jer. 1:5).

The fact that cultic holiness was not neutral to ethical values is clear from the consistent cultic emphasis upon moral life. One can cite many examples. Cultic minded Ezekiel complains, 'By the multitude of your iniquites, in the unrighteousness of your trade, you profaned your sanctuaries (28:18). Zephaniah says, 'Her priests profane what is sacred, they do violence in the law' (3:4).[49] In the fifteenth and the twenty-fourth Psalms, one's uprightness of heart is pointed out as the requisite for approach to the holy God. 'Who shall dwell on the holy hill? He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart' (Ps. 15:1-2).

Because the Holy God dwells amidst Israel they were to be a 'holy people' (Deut. 7:6, 26:19). This demand is clearly made in the Holiness Code (Lev. 17–26) with the central statement of Lev. 19:2. The precept 'You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy' is explained in terms of both ritual and, more so, of moral truths such as reverence for parents, caring for the poor and the strangers, truthfulness and justice, restraint from adultery and lust, and 'loving your neighbour as yourself' (Lev. 19).

> 'If the cultic character of holiness is prominent in this code, Chapter 19 shows that cultic qualification is inconceivable without purity. Cultic purity however demands personal purity. The agioi must be agnoi. Hence the sphere of ethics is taken up into that of religion'.[50]

In the account of the Passover celebration by Hezekiah, one notes a close association between holiness and cleanliness, and the latter being based on 'setting one's heart to see God' and 'not according to the sanctuary's rules of cleanness' (II Chron. 30:17–20).

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[48] The title might or might not be original with Isaiah. Jacob, *op. cit.*, p. 89. Although Isaiah was the first one to use the term the germ of it is found in Hosea's use of 'The Holy One in your midst' (11:9).

[49] In the general context of the text of faithfulness, righteousness and justice. it is unlikely that the reference here is merely to ritual law.

[50] Procksch, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

Again, such prophetic oracles which are hostile to the cult can be understood only in terms of their being directed against certain degenerated forms of cult which ceased to be holy before Yahweh. Cult in itself was not inherently holy or valuable. Its place, importance and desirability were based upon its fulfilment of God's demands which, to the prophets, were to be understood in moral terms. Amos speaks of the holy name of God as being profaned by Israel through their greed, adultery and the oppression of the poor (2:7-8). To Isaiah, the holy feast, the offerings and the incense were all abhorred by 'the Holy one' so long as there prevailed bloodshed and corruption (Isa. 1:2–15).

The Sinai tradition consisted of not just the thunder, thick cloud and the devouring fire, but the giving of the commandments and the making of the covenant. The dreadful God of Sinai was one who made national and personal demands upon his people for a moral life. It was the decalogue with its religious and moral demands which stood central to the Sinai experience of Israel.

To conclude this investigation, it may be said that Israel conceived of God on the one hand as one unapproachably majestic and great, and on the other hand as one who dwelt among them; thus holiness presented Yahweh as transcendent, and at the same time, imminent. The former concept filled the believer with fear and dread for the holy God, and the latter made him draw near with submission and obedience.

Man always had a deep awareness of his unworthiness to come near Yahweh, and his need to be made ready to approach him. The cultic laws and practices try to meet this need. The cult itself stood at the level of personal relationship with Yahweh whom the people had come to know, also, through his mighty acts of redemption, his covenant and his moral demands. Thus the preparation to come near him was not merely ritual but both ritual and moral. Only those who have clean hands and pure hearts can ascend the hill of the Lord and stand in his holy place (Ps. 24:3–6).

Any sphere of holiness had a very real personal content, it being the sphere of God's presence or activity, and holiness in all its aspects belonged to God who is 'of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on wrong' (Heb. 1:12-13). It was this unique concept of God which the Hebrews maintained, which gave to their understanding of holiness its moral content.