

Shabbat Shalom everybody! Thank you all for coming, it means a lot to me.

My Torah portion is called Chayyei Sarah, which means the life of Sarah. It starts when Sarah dies, so Abraham goes out to get a burial site for his wife. He approaches the Hittite community to buy a burial site and speaks to Ephron who offers to give Abraham a cave, but Abraham insists on buying the site and paying a fair price for it. Abraham feels that he has to own the burial cave so that it can't just be taken away from him some time in the future. He buys the Cave of Machpelah to be a special place for him to bury Sara and to be able to mourn. That specific cave ends up becoming the burial place for not just Sarah but also for Isaac, Jacob, Leah, Rebecca, and himself.

Abraham wanted no one to doubt the cave belonged to him, and thus he created a very sensitive and challenging situation today.... Because in modern day there is a very complicated argument over the future of the cave. If and when there will be peace in the Middle East it is clear that Hebron which is mostly inhabited by Palestinians will be under Palestinian control but it is not clear if the Machpelah cave would belong to the Palestinians or the Israelis- both sides see it as a holy place and thus...we have a problem.

That makes me question whether or not it was a good idea for Abraham to have bought the site, making it a very special or holy place. Is it right to make a place holy?

So what does Judaism say about holiness?

Let's start by talking about physical space or what people call holy sites.

In Judaism there are a few holy places that we recognize. For example, the Western Wall is considered to be a very holy place in Judaism, but the wall itself wasn't anything special when it was first built. The wall was just there to support the base for a great temple. It was a simple retainer wall!!!!

After the temple was built the ark with the tablets – on which the 10 commandments were inscribed – was placed in a special section of the temple called “Kodesh Ha'hodashim”. the holy of holies. So when the temple was destroyed, and the Jewish people were not allowed to go up to Temple Mount any more – they set the Wall as the closest place they could get to the holy of holies and started praying there. They also didn't know exactly where the holy of holies was located and did not want accidentally to enter the location so the wall became the closest that the Jewish people would go to the site. It's strange that the wall itself has no importance, and it wasn't considered anything but just a supporting structure until that became the closest we could get to the holy of holies. So even the wall that is considered a holy site is only holy because its location not because any special quality it holds

Another holy place is Mount Sinai. I find it ironic that it is a holy place and we don't have a clue of where the mountain is actually located. Mount Sinai is where the tablets with the Ten Commandments were brought down. But Mount Sinai could really just be a metaphor. It makes us think that in order to receive Torah we need to rise up, to be something greater. Mt Sinai could just be a symbol. Did you know that when we read

the torah, in a way we are on top of mt Sinai because like climbing a mountain we become higher when we are on the bima! So once again we see that Judasim doesn't make a big deal from holy spaces...

What about people? One thing that can be considered to be holy are people. In most religions a holy person is a very important person to their religion. But in Judaism all people are holy. That's because we are all created in the image of God. There aren't special holy people.

So if in Judaism, it is neither holy places nor holy people that truly matter...what does?

What was the first thing God made holy?

During the time of creation the first thing made holy was time- the seventh day - Shabbat, the sacred time.

The Torah says: On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done.

Holy time can be truly special time in a religious sense, like Shabbat. Or it could just be special time or memories. We are supposed to cherish holy time and keep it holy. What I thought of is that in the Torah, the Ten Commandments are said in two different ways. When referring to Shabbat, at first it says to Observe Shabbat, but then it says to Remember Shabbat. I realized that the reason why is because remembering and observing go hand in hand. If you don't remember a time you can't observe it, and if you don't observe you will forget.

When I thought of this I thought about memories verses possessions, I realized that things and people can be taken away from you, but nobody can take your memories. I thought of the memories as time and the possessions and people as places and people, and what I realized is that although it's nice to have mementos and possessions, the most important thing of all is to have memories.