

To Distinguish Holy from Unholy: Sacrifice and Purities in the Torah

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And you shall be holy to me, because I, God, am holy....” (Lev 20:26).

Introduction: System, Intersystem and the Cultural Logic of Classification

1. “The Blood of the Covenant”: Holiness Code as Intersystem
2. Ways of Looking at Dirt: The System of Purities
3. From Tabernacle to Temple: The System of Sacrifices
4. St. Paul, *Pirke Avot*, and the Survival of Holiness

Conclusion: Understanding Ritual Systems (that we do not ourselves practice)

Selected Citations

1) “...history, the avoidance of idolatry, the ability to make distinctions, and study.” [Ozick, *Metaphor and Memory*, 224]

2) “The concept of dirtiness has contaminated the conceptual field; the idea of disgust at eating unclean things dominates interpretation. The kitchen, medical, and bathroom senses intrude...[But] appeals to medical and aesthetic principles are not the way to interpret an enigmatic law in Leviticus; the only safe way is to trace the contrast sets and parallels the book itself develops.” [*Leviticus as Literature*, 145].

3) “The cultivation of tribalism along with strangeness...involved an intense preoccupation with bodily purity. Civilization as a struggle against odors, excretions, secretions, and ‘germs’...”, [Slezkine, 45]

4) “And it came to pass, when David dwelled in his house, that David said to Nathan the prophet: “Lo I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the Lord dwells under curtains.” [1 Chron:17]

5) “... they are, by and large, the production of temples and royal courts and their *raison d’être*—the temple, upon which the priest’s and scribe’s income rested, as “Center” and microcosm; SECOND, they presumed requirements for exact repetition in ritual and the concomitant notion of ritual as a reenactment of divine activities, both of which are dependent upon written texts which only the elite could read; and THIRD, [they provide] propaganda for their chief patron, the king, as guardian of cosmic and social order.” [J.Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory*, 292]

6) “[Religious] ritualizations....translate external uncertainties into a [system] that either happens or not but that cannot be varied, and therefore neutralizes the capacity for deception, lies, and deviant behavior.” [Luhmann, *Social Systems*, 185],

7) “[W]here lines of abominability are drawn heavy stakes are at issue. The classification of the universe is part and parcel of social organization, and the categories are useful in defining who can be admitted where, and who comes first and who comes second or nowhere at all.” [Mary Douglas, in *JRS* 18 (2004) 176]

8) “A native thinker makes the penetrating comment that ‘*All sacred things must have their place.*’ It could even be said that being in their place is what makes them sacred for if they were taken out of their place, even in thought, the entire order of the universe would be destroyed” [C. Lévi Strauss, 10]

Selected Reading

On purities

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and danger : an analysis of the concepts of pollution and taboo*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: 1970.

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On sacrifice

Jay, Nancy. *Throughout Your Generations Forever. Sacrifice, Religion, and Paternity*. Chicago: 1992

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Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *The Savage Mind*. Chicago: 1966.

Luhmann, Niklas. *Social Systems*. Stanford: 1995.

Ozick, Cynthia. *Metaphor and Memory*. Vintage: 1991.

Smith, J. Z. *Map is not Territory*. Chicago: 1993.

Slezkine, Yuri. *The Jewish Century*. Princeton: 2004.

Journal of Ritual Studies 18.2 (2004) = Book Review Forum on Mary Douglas's *Leviticus as Literature*.

And for connections between Israelite sacrifices and Greco-Roman sacrifices see K. C. Hanson, *Parallels and Connections Between the Hellenic, Semitic, and Anatolian Cultures* <http://www.kchanson.com/CLASSIFIEDBIB/anegreek.html>