The Nature of the Sacred

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## Guide to app usage

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Key stroke | Effect |
| n, space | next slide |
| p | previous slide |
| f | fullscreen |
| esc, o | overview slide |
| m | toggle menu |
| audio inlay | start/stop audio playback |

## What is Sacred

### Complex character of the Sacred?

* wide range of phenomena
* sacred | profane – "other than ordinary"
* sacred as **extraordinary**
* important that **sacred** is not tied to a particular religious tradition
* Many have the experience or can imagine the difference between sacred and not-sacred. I think of my experience one Christmas midnight. We walked out of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco after midnight mass. We got in our car and drove 2 blocks and there was a bustling street advertising "Live Sex" shows. The contrast was stark.
* Biblical Hebrew for “Sacred” indicates a reality that is somehow distinct, “set apart,” “other” than ordinary.
* “Sacred” is a complex but useful word for our purposes because it is used for a wide range of phenomena: places, time, persons, events, and deities.
* But, generally, when people speak of something as sacred, they mean to designate the thing in question as “other than ordinary.”
* In the broadest sense of the term, the sacred is the “extraordinary.”
* The value of using the term “sacred” is that it is not tradition specific.

### The Sacred and The Holy

* Often the words “sacred” and “holy” are used as equivalents.
* Thus, the best way to identify the sacred is to identify that which is designated holy.
  + The early Israelites were instructed: “Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy.”
  + A popular Christian hymn begins “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty!”
  + Islamic tradition refers to Jerusalem as *al-quds—the holy city, or the city set apart*.

The **Sabbath** as holy. Keeping a "hedge" about it. What is **holy** in your life? How do you show that it's holy?

Is the **flag** "holy"?

## Examples

### Sacred in Bible

O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life,my lips will praise You. (Psalm 63:1–3)

### Sacred in Hinduism

Thou [God] art the Imperishable, the supreme Object of Knowledge, Thou art the ultimate resting-place of this universe; Thou art the immortal guardian of the eternal right; Thou art the everlasting Spirit. . . . Without beginning, middle, or end, of infinite power, Of infinite arms, whose eyes are the moon and sun, I see Thee, whose face is flaming fire, Burning this whole universe with Thy radiance. (11:18–20) (**Bhagavad Gita**)

### Sacred in Buddhism

“Its form, O king, cannot be elucidated by similes, but its qualities can. . . . As the lotus is unstained by water, so is Nirvana unstained by all the defilements. . . . As cool water allays feverish heat, so also Nirvana is cool and allays the fever of all the passions. . . . As medicine protects from the torments of poison, so Nirvana protects from the torments of the poisonous passions. . . . Nirvana and medicine both give security. . . . As a mountain peak is unshakeable, so is Nirvana. . . . ” **Buddhism**: "The Nature of Nirvana"

## The Concept in various cultures

### The Concept of Sacred Reality

* Derived from the Latin “sanctus”.
* “Sanctus” means “holy” and refers to something separated or set apart from other things.
* The related terms from the Hebrew (*kadosh קדוש ) and the Greek (/hagios, 'αγιος*) mean the same.
* At minimum, the sacred is distinct from the profane.

### Sacred Reality in Various Cultures

* Biblical witness is that **God** is only truly **holy** – all else is holy because it is connected to God
* Ancient Rome **sanctus** applied to the temples where rituals were dedicated to gods. *Fanum* was the name of the temple. Ritual was performed "before" the *fanum* – and were thus **pro** (before) the **fanum**.
* The biblical witness regards everything that is created by God as holy precisely because God touched it first. Some have even emphasized that everything that is created participates in some way with God and so nothing is entirely un-holy
* Our very word "profane" comes from the religious application at Roman temples – "before the temple"

### Sacred Reality in the Hebrew Bible

* in Hebrew Bible *kadosh* is used of those things God has chosen:
  + the people of Israel
  + the land of the people
  + certain foods (**kosher**)
  + certain human relations
* nothing is special except in relation to God
  + By contrast, the Hebrew Bible uses *kadosh* to describe God and things set apart by God’s choice: the people of Israel, the land they live in, types of food, modes of human relations.
  + There is nothing special about such things except that they are chosen by God or are in some kind of relation to God.

## Sacred and Profane

### The Sacred and The Ordinary

* **sacred** can be described as **really, real** – everything else somehow pales
* **sacred** provides authority and truth where everywhere else is relativity and subjective experience
* **sacred** is other than **ordinary** but is made **manifest through ordinary existence.**
  + examples of the **holy** can include stones, trees, sky, bodies of water, various people

### General Concept of the Sacred

* Sacred reality is present wherever something is **real** by 4 criteria:
  + it is "set apart" from everything else in the world
  + it is in some sense beyond human control
  + it is in some sense vital for the well-being of humans
  + it orders human existence

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