

The Importance of Both Sacred and Profane

The final blessing of the brief *Havdalah* service that ends Shabbat gives thanks for many distinctions, including those between light and darkness, the six days of work and the seventh day of rest, and *kodesh*—the “holy,” and *chol*—the “profane.” The blessing praises the distinctions themselves for making our lives rich, acknowledging that we need, in fact, both light and darkness (and the shades in between), work and rest, and engagement with the sacred and the ordinary (and the shades in between) in order to have a full and balanced life.

The importance of both sacred and profane is evident at this time of year. We are preparing for our May Congregational Meeting, which deals with issues like budgets and policy—profane, workweek issues, if there ever were! And yet, in order for our sacred community to function, we need to show up for the profane work. The meeting falls during the time of the counting of the Omer, when we count the days between Passover and the holiday of Shavuot in order to prepare to receive revelation. Many people use this time to focus on daily spiritual work (there are even apps that will help you do this). It’s a sacred time, but ideally spiritual work has consequences for how we live our day-to-day, profane lives: how we speak to our family members, how we give *tzedakah*, how we prioritize our tasks and spend our time.

And then there are the other holidays that fall during this season, straddling the boundary between sacred and profane. May opens with *Yom HaShoah*, Holocaust Remembrance Day, and continues with *Yom HaZikaron*, Israeli Memorial Day, and *Yom Ha’Atzma’ut*, Israeli Independence Day. These holidays and how to observe them are somewhat controversial in the Jewish world, not least because of the question of the extent to which it’s appropriate to sacralize the events they commemorate, significant as they are for contemporary Jewish identity.

With so many opportunities, I bless us each that we find an appropriate balance and blurring of sacred and profane in this season, and gratitude for both in our lives.