

As the navel is set in the centre of the human body,
so is the land of Israel the navel of the world...
situated in the centre of the world,
and Jerusalem in the centre of the land of Israel,
and the sanctuary in the centre of Jerusalem,
and the holy place in the centre of the sanctuary,
and the ark in the centre of the holy place,
and the foundation stone before the holy place,
because from it the world was founded.

Midrash Tanchuma, *Qedoshim*

What is the Western Wall?

By virtue of the Western Wall's proximity to the Holy of Holies, this retention or supporting wall referred to in Hebrew as the *Kotel*, has become the most revered place in Jewish consciousness and tradition. It is located in the midst of what is called the Old City in Jerusalem. At its base—or at least at its lowest visible level—are massive Herodian stones dating back to, of course, the Herodian Second Temple renovations in progress during the time of Jesus. Throughout the Jewish world, prayer orientation is toward the site of the destroyed Second Temple (AD 70 or 70 CE). Since it is thought that the Divine Presence never departed from the Holy of Holies, the surviving Wall itself has come to be associated with the Divine Presence. Many human hands have touched the Wall while praying, making its stones smooth as if polished. It is a common practice to tuck wadded prayer notes—*kvitelach*—into the cracks and crevices of the softening stone. The Wall. Prayer. *Kvitelach*. All three of these powerfully express and illustrate the human desire to connect, to communicate with, and come in contact with the Divine Presence.