Jerusalem's Two Types of Sanctity, and Their Implications

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The Gemara in several places deals with the question whether the "first sanctification" was only temporary or meant to be forever. This question arises both with respect to the sanctity of the land of Israel and with respect to the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple. The land was sanctified for the first time in the days of Yehoshua, whereas Jerusalem and the Temple were sanctified in the days of David and Shelomo. Regarding both sanctities, the Gemara raises the question as to whether they were meant to be valid forever, or whether they lapsed with the destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylonia in the days of Nevuchadnetzar. The gist of the issue is whether these sanctities depend upon specific external circumstances, e.g., the people of Israel's presence in the land, or whether they are not dependent upon anything else, so that once the original sanctification took effect, it remains valid forever. The Gemara raises a similar question regarding the "second sanctification" in the days of the Ezra.

The Rambam distinguishes between the two sanctities. Regarding the sanctity of the land of Israel, he rules that the first sanctification has lapsed, and that only the sanctification brought about by Ezra is valid forever. Regarding the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple, however, he rules that the original sanctification is valid forever. This means that, fundamentally speaking, one is permitted today to eat of the holiest sacrifices (*kodshei kadashim*) on the site where the Temple had stood, and to eat second-tithe (*ma'aser sheni*) within the confines of Jerusalem. On the other hand, one who treads upon the Temple site in a state of ritual impurity is liable for the punishment of excision. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira* 6:16) explains the difference between the two sanctities as follows. The sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple depends upon the *Shekhina*, God's Presence, and the *Shekhina* never departed, whereas the sanctity of the land of Israel depends upon the conquest of the land, and therefore it lapsed when the land was removed from Israel's possession.

Much can be said about the Rambam's view, but I would like to focus on the position of the Ra'avad, who disagrees with the Rambam:

This [ruling derives from] his own reasoning, and I know not where it comes from… According to the view that the first sanctification was not meant to be forever, there is no distinction between the Temple and Jerusalem, and the rest of the land of Israel. Moreover, I say that even according to Rabbi Yose, who said that the second sanctification was meant to be forever – he only said this regarding the rest of the land of Israel, but regarding Jerusalem and the Temple he did not say it. For Ezra knew that the Temple and Jerusalem would change in the future and be sanctified by another eternal sanctification with the glory of God forever. Thus it was revealed to me, God's mystery to those who fear Him. Therefore, one who enters there [the Temple site] today is not liable for excision. (Ra'avad, *Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira* 6:14)

At the beginning of his critical note, the Ra'avad says that the Rambam's distinction between the sanctity of the land of Israel and the sanctity of the Temple must not be accepted: if the first sanctification of the land lapsed, then the same should apply to the first sanctification of the Temple. There are two ways to understand this argument:

1) The sanctity of the land of Israel is inferior to the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple, and, therefore, if the inferior sanctity of the land did not survive the destruction and the exile, all the more so must the more sublime sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple have lapsed.

2) The sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple depends upon the sanctity of the land of Israel, such that it would be impossible for the sanctity of the land to have lapsed, while the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple still continued. According to the Rambam, this was the situation during the period between the destruction of the first Temple and the construction of the second Temple, whereas according to the Ra'avad, such a situation is impossible.

There are two aspects to the sanctity of Jerusalem. On the one hand, this sanctity is connected to the uniqueness of Jerusalem in relation to the other cities of Israel: only in Jerusalem can the Temple be constructed, and only there can sacrifices of lesser holiness (*kodashim kalim*) and second–tithe be eaten. On the other hand, it is possible that Jerusalem was sanctified only because it is part of the land of Israel. Jerusalem is set apart from the rest of the land, but it draws its sanctity from it. It is regarded as the "courtyard of God," but it is not detached from its surroundings. Jerusalem's unique sanctity is like a second story resting on the basic sanctity of the land of Israel in the midst of which it is situated.

The Ra'avad's argument may be understood as follows: Had the sanctity of the land lapsed with the exile, the sanctity of Jerusalem could not possibly have remained intact. When the land of Israel turns into a land like all other lands, Jerusalem loses its unique standing as well.

The Rambam, as stated above, disagrees with the Ra'avad, maintaining that the sanctity of Jerusalem remained in force even after the sanctity of the land of Israel lapsed. It is possible that he maintains that there is no connection between the two sanctities, and that the sanctity of Jerusalem does not at all depend upon the status of the land of Israel.

R. Chayyim Soloveitchik and his son R. Mosheh, however, understood the Rambam differently. According to them, there are two aspects to the sanctity of the land of Israel. One aspect is the sanctity of the soil, which is of vital importance regarding obligation in the *mitzvot* that are dependent upon the land of Israel. A second aspect is the sanctity of the place, the land of Israel being the place where the *Shekhina* rests. The first aspect lapsed along with the exile, but its continued existence is not necessary for the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple to remain in effect. The second aspect, however, continued all the time, for the *Shekhina* never departed. The sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple is based on this second aspect of the land of Israel, and since this aspect never lapsed, the sanctity of Jerusalem always remained intact.

According to this, the Rambam agrees that the sanctity of Jerusalem is connected to the sanctity of the land and is dependent upon the entire land being defined as the place in which the *Shekhina* rests.

The end of the Ra'avad's critical note sounds a different note. The Ra'avad argues that there is room to distinguish between the two sanctities in the opposite manner: the sanctity of the land of Israel exists today, whereas the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple has lapsed, so that one who enters the site of the Temple is not liable for excision. The Ra'avad explains that Jerusalem and the Temple will be sanctified once again in the future when the glory of God will reveal itself in them, and therefore Ezra took care to sanctify them only with temporary sanctity. According to the Ra'avad, thus it was revealed to him, "God's mystery to those who fear Him."

The earthly Jerusalem depends, then, upon the heavenly Jerusalem, and sanctity cannot rest there until the glory of God reveals itself in the world. During the period that the Temple stood, facts were created on the ground and the *Shekhina* rested on the Temple. After the Temple was destroyed, however, the sanctity could no longer remain in Jerusalem or in the Temple, and will not return there until the arrival of the final redemption.

The words of the Ra'avad reflect, therefore, a certain duality regarding Jerusalem. On the one hand, he sees it as an integral part of the land of Israel, and he maintains that it draws its sanctity from the entire land. On the other hand, he emphasizes the difference between them: Even when the land of Israel is sanctified, the sanctity of Jerusalem remains but a dream and a vision.

Today, this duality presses upon our consciousness more than ever before. In this period, when parts of the land of Israel are being ceded to others, many people repeatedly emphasize that Jerusalem is not part of the discussion, and that there will be no concessions in its regard. Nevertheless, some circles are prepared to bring Jerusalem into the debate.

This position is a cause for worry on several counts. First of all, the fear exists that the status of Jerusalem will continue to be eroded, and that negotiations will be conducted in its regard. Beyond this, however, we are dealing here with a symptom of a more serious problem: the growing domination of pragmatism and living for today, and the preference given to considerations of convenience over important values.

Practically speaking, the secular outlook does not recognize the phenomenon of sanctity. Thus, it follows that all days are equal, as are all objects, and all places, so that Jerusalem has no greater importance than any other place.

As long as this erosion of Jerusalem's status continues, so too will it turn from a symptom of a phenomenon into a factor that itself intensifies the phenomenon, thus strengthening the scorn shown to the status of Jerusalem and to holy values in general.

Jerusalem's recapture during the Six-Day War brought outbursts of joy and elation among all sectors of the population. Jerusalem lit a spark even in the hearts of non-religious people, who didn't know exactly how to explain why Jerusalem was so dear to them. Today, the status of Jerusalem continues to be diminished, and it is hard to know where the process will stop.

What has been said here relates to us as well. We must strive to strengthen the status of Jerusalem in both its aspects. Moreover, we must strengthen our sensitivity and awareness regarding everything that relates to sanctity in general. This awareness finds expression in various situations: when a person stands next to a Torah scroll on *Shabbat* or *Yom Tov*, or when he stands at the gates of Jerusalem. A decline in the status of Jerusalem impacts upon our consciousness of sanctity in general.

Jerusalem draws upon the sanctity of the land of Israel, but is also regarded as having sublime sanctity of its own. It relates both to realization and to vision; it is connected both to the present and to the future. We must anchor these different aspects deep within us and understand the relationship between them – only then will we fully appreciate the meaning and value of Jerusalem.

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