YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Manitou**

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**Shiur #03:**

**The Purpose of Creation —**

**Earning the Right to Exist**

In the previous *shiur*, we pointed out the seeming contradiction between the belief that God created the world, and hence the idea that His creation should be complete and perfect, and the problems and defects that we see when we actually have a look at the world as it is.

This question has troubled humanity throughout the generations. Manitou maintains that each side of the contradiction is valid: God did indeed create the heavens and the earth, and the world is indeed “*tohu va-vohu*.” The world was created deficient. *Chazal* understand this as God’s deliberate intention, and as we noted, they interpret the verse from the end of Creation, “which God created to do,” as proof that the world needs work and as a call to action. The world needs man to bring it to completion.

Manitou explains that the world is indeed the product of the Divine plan, the “intention behind Creation,” but this intention will be realized in full only at the End of Days. The end of the action is the first in thought, and in between the original thought and the end of the action there is a lengthy intermediate stage, which is all of history. It is in this dimension that reality moves from its deficient starting point to the complete point of conclusion.

This perspective broadens the conventional religious view, which focuses on biography — i.e., the successive events and stations that a person passes through from birth until death. This process traces man’s actions, while everything that goes on around him belongs to the fixed conditions of reality, which create obstacles and challenges along the way. According to this view, reality is not supposed to undergo any sort of change. However, according to Manitou’s view, the world as a whole undergoes a process of development. It is for this reason that in *Tanakh*, and in the Jewish worldview in general, the historical dimension occupies such a significant place.

This is what we have seen so far, and later on we will discover additional layers, since Manitou’s philosophy is developed in a systematic manner, each idea building on the previous one. At this stage, now that we have an idea of the pattern, we need to infuse it with content. In other words, the significance of this structure, according to Manitou, raises the following questions: Why did God create the world in this way? Why create a world that is deficient, to be completed only at the end of such a long process? No less importantly, where is the world supposed to progress to? What is meant to happen in it?

**Earning the right to exist**

Let us start with a teaching of Ramchal. Ramchal is not quoted extensively by Manitou, but in the context of Creation he cites him as part of a broader perspective, which we shall see later on. The principle that Ramchal sets down is fairly well known, and appears in many of his works. Manitou chooses to quote from *Kalach Pitchei Chokhma*:

That which is known to us of the intentions of the blessed God is that, in His desire to act benevolently, He wanted to create entities that would receive His benevolence. And in order for this benevolence to be complete, it was necessary that they would receive it by right, not by charity, so that it would not be marred by their shame — like one who eats food that is not his own. And in order for them to be able to be deserving, He produced a reality which would be reliant on them for its repair — unlike Himself — and by repairing it, they would become worthy… (First Rule)

In this excerpt, Ramchal makes four separate statements:

1. God wishes to show benevolence.
2. In order to show benevolence, He created creatures.
3. These creatures must achieve the good that God gives by their own virtue.
4. In order for them to receive the good by right, and not as charity, it was necessary for God to create an entire system in which the creatures could accumulate merits. The moment they accumulate merits, they can receive God’s goodness by right. The way in which this is set up is that the reality is in need of repair. God had nothing preventing Him from creating a perfect reality — He Himself has no need for repair of the world. But in order that the creatures could accumulate merits, He created the world in such a way that it needs repair. The Midrash explains “which God created to do” as teaching that the world was made in a way that requires action, so that the creatures can perform the action and effect repair and earn God’s goodness themselves.

As Manitou formulates it, this is how man earns his right to exist. Throughout his life, moment by moment, man is intensively involved in earning his right to exist in the world. Manitou emphasizes the difference between “presence” and “existence”: a person can be “present” as a statistical datum, or he can “exist,” when his existence has validity and meaning. He adds that by earning the right to exist, man arrives at a stance that is face-to-face with God. So long as he has not earned his own existence by his own efforts, he is ashamed to stand before God. The shame is not mere emotion, and man’s purpose consists of more than solving the problem of this discomfort. The shame reflects man’s true state, if he has not earned his right to exist.

Through this work of earning, there is another result, too: man completes the repair of Creation and becomes God’s partner, as we shall explain below.

This we find that man is supposed to undergo a three-stage process. There is the stage where his existence is granted by God; there is the stage where he earns his existence through his own efforts, and there is the acceptance of his existence by his own right. Manitou — apparently in the footsteps of Rav Ashlag, whom we will encounter later on in this context — draws a parallel between these stages and the biographical progression of a person’s life: childhood parallels the period after Creation, during which man receives everything through an act of kindness; the stage of acceptance of *mitzvot*, where man’s work begins, and he can earn the right to his existence; and the end of his life, during which he receives all the good that God wanted to give him.

In discussing the second stage, Manitou provides an implicit and surprising answer to the question of the criterion according to which a person is deemed ready to accept the yoke of *mitzvot*. We might have expected that this would depend on his intellectual level — how well he understands the commandments, etc. However, *Chazal* (e.g. Mishna *Sanhedrin* 8:1) stipulate a different criterion: “once he produces two [pubic] hairs.” What is the connection between this physical manifestation of maturation and accepting the yoke of *mitzvot*? Manitou explains that a person is obligated with regard to the *mitzvot* when he reaches the stage of being able to create new life. We shall return to this point later.

**Progress — on which axis?**

The idea that man is supposed to undergo a process means that his purpose cannot be limited to observance of Torah and *mitzvot*. We might have thought that when a person is judged at the end of his life, there is only one criterion that matters: whether he observed the commandments. However, Ramchal, in his *Mesillat Yesharim*, takes us two steps further. Firstly, he describes an inner process that a person is meant to undergo, strengthening his good inclination over his evil inclination, and this process is meant to happen within and along with his observance of commandments.

The second step pertains to the concept of *deveikut* — cleaving to God, which is the core around which the process is built. A person is meant to build himself through the traits of watchfulness, alacrity, and so on, until he achieves sanctity, which is a very high level of *deveikut*. This is how he is meant to earn his place in this world. On what foundation, according to Manitou, is this process based?

Ramchal presents us with a very important formula, boiled down to its essence: “it was necessary that they would receive it by right, not by charity.” This is the essence of Jewish morality: “He who hates gifts shall live” (*Mishlei* 15:27). Manitou talks about morality on the private level and morality on the public level. Moreover, he proposes a whole strategy for the form of giving and taking on the societal level, including instruction in the proper societal outlook and the repair of societal life. For Ramchal, it appears that the main foundation is the realm of a person’s dealings with himself and with God; for Manitou, the main foundation is the repair of society. Of course, this does not have to be an alternative to Ramchal’s view, but it is an addition, which in Manitou’s writings becomes the dominant element. This relates back to Manitou’s emphasis on the historical dimension: the historical process does not happen 3within each person individually but rather amongst society, and in the national and even international sphere.

The act of Creation establishes, for the Hebrew, the moral obligation. The Creator wished to create the world in order to bestow existence on an “other.” I, as a creature, am commanded to imitate the Creator and to align my path with the supreme path of God. This alignment is not theoretical, but rather practical. I am commanded to behave in my day-to-day life in accordance with the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. (*Sod Midrash Ha-toladot* III, 44-45).

We might clarify the difference between Manitou and Ramchal by referring to Ramchal in a different source. *Da’at Tevunot* starts with the same idea: the creation of the world in order to show benevolence, and the way in which man can attain good in his own right. But further on Ramchal introduces another idea: God created the world in order to reveal His unique Oneness. The following question arises: what is missing from the first idea — that of creation of the world in order to show benevolence — which prompts Ramchal to offer the second idea as well? The answer is that we are aware of the existence of a historical process. The prophets declare that the world is destined to reach a state of completion and perfection, whereas according to the first idea, the world has to remain eternally a world of action, doing, repairing. In addition, if the world has to be built on action and doing alone, then there can be no level that the world necessarily has to achieve, for it is possible to conceive of a situation whereby man, of his own free choice, will not achieve that level. The concept of a historical process does not sit well with the first idea, and therefore Ramchal adds the second, which is that God’s Oneness must eventually be revealed.

In contrast to Ramchal, who needs to complement his first idea with a second one, Manitou integrates the historical process into the first idea of man acquiring the right to his existence. This requires some explanation: how is the right of existence, which is acquired through observance of Torah and the commandments, connected to society, humanity and history in general?

For now, we shall look only at the principles that demonstrate the connection between them. Firstly, the Torah certainly speaks to the public sphere: after all, it was given to the nation, not to individuals. This means that its intention is not just to show the way for each individual to work on his right to his existence; it has a historical (general) purpose too. Secondly, the Torah offers moral guidance for interpersonal relations. Therefore, when Manitou speaks of a “whole strategy for the form of giving and taking on the societal level,” he means that the system of societal life — maintained among individuals or among groups — entails an entire world of action and work that facilitates the earning of the right of existence.

To summarize thus far: Manitou follows in the footsteps of Ramchal, but then moves on from the individual to the collective, and from the inner work of *deveikut* to work in the societal and national sphere. At a later stage, we shall examine more closely the substance of this path.

**The "progress" view in comparison with other worldviews**

Manitou's worldview contains a great deal of optimism: the world is deficient, but it is destined to become whole and perfect. There is hope, there are aspirations, there is a goal to aim for. This optimism stands in contrast to many other worldviews.

Paganism perceives the world in all its limited smallness; it is static and unchanging. Classic Greek culture was centered around the tragedy. The story of a person's life was a closed circle with no escape. This was a cultural expression of the pagan worldview that preceded the Greek Empire: the world has no destination; it is headed nowhere.

Greek philosophy takes another step and posits that it is possible to enlighten the intellect and to learn how to get along in this world. The world cannot be changed, but a person can progress and improve his lot: he can extricate himself, arrive at Truth, and cleave to that which is eternal. Still, the world will remain eternally defective. Buddhism, too, maintains that the root of the problem is the expectation that reality ought to be different from what it is. The moment that one stops thinking about reality, history, and the real world, he is redeemed from man's hopeless situation. Only liberation of the consciousness from the constraints of reality can provide man with infinite tranquility.

The monotheistic religions adopt the fundamental Jewish worldview, but take it in different directions. We shall not discuss Islam for now, but with regard to Christianity, Manitou sums up the difference between it and Judaism as follows: Christianity argues that the world is destined to be good and whole, but it sets down no way of getting there. It will happen not as a result of our actions, but rather as an act of Divine grace. Man has no opportunity or ability to effect repair.

Like a pendulum, the modern view swings in the opposite direction: it liberates mankind from Christian despair, asserting that man does indeed have the power to bring about repair and improvement. However, modernity severs itself from any sort of faith, removing God from the picture and placing man in His stead. It agrees that the starting position of the world cannot be changed, but believes that if we understand the rules according to which the world operates, we can enlist them in our service. This conclusion has ushered in a period of optimism, with faith in human redemption at human hands. This optimistic view was shattered in the World War II, where it became clear that man's intellect and abilities lead him not to redemption, but rather to catastrophe. The period since the war has witnessed the rise of postmodernism — a culture of despair, devoid of any horizon of hope, despite man's longing for it. The only worldview that still believes in repair is that of the Torah.

Our next step will be to explore why it is necessary that the world be created deficient and seeking wholeness.

Translated by Kaeren Fish