YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Manitou**

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**Shiur #13: The Fraternity Equation**

We saw in the previous *shiur* that the story of Kayin and Hevel is in fact a formative event in human history. While Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden pertains to the religious realm – the relationship between man and God – the story of Kayin and Hevel pertains to the realm of inter-personal relations.

Manitou sides with those scholars who view human relations as the central axis of the Torah. This view dates back to *Chazal*, as expressed, for example, in Hillel’s response to the would-be convert who asks to be taught the entire Torah “on one leg”: “That which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow.” Or, as R. Akiva taught, “‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ – this is a major principle in the Torah.” In more recent times, we find this emphasis in the teachings of R. Ashlag, whose son was among Manitou’s teachers during the period that he lived in Israel. For R. Ashlag, the commandments “between man and his fellow” are the main focus of the Torah (see his Introduction to *Sefer Ha-Zohar*, end of #19, and his “*Maamar Matan Torah*”). Of course, this does not mean that one’s fellow is the entire purpose of the Torah, nor that he is more important than God. What it means is that one’s inter-personal relationships are the main challenge in the quest to cleave to God.

For Manitou, the central issue in *Sefer Bereishit* is fraternity. The entire *sefer* concerns relations between siblings. The tension in this area starts with Kayin and Hevel, and it continues via Yishmael and Yitzchak and later via Esav and Yaakov. Only at the end of the *sefer*, following the profoundly painful and dysfunctional relations among Yaakov’s children, do we find a repair of the fraternal relationship between Yosef and Yehuda.

This view of *Sefer Bereishit* has far-reaching implications for our *avodat Hashem* (Divine service). Our relationships with other people occupy a significant and extensive part of our lives, so if this sphere represents the focus of our *avodat Hashem*, then we may conclude that these relationships are a primary arena for serving God. Every relationship, every interaction, every encounter, and every exchange or dealing with someone else becomes part of a person’s most fundamental religious behavior. This is ongoing, constant work, and it is integral to our everyday functioning.

In fact, every encounter with the other is an encounter with the Creator. Every day, every minute, we are faced with the fraternity equation. Whether it is the bus driver, postman, bank clerk, neighbor, or family member, with every interaction with another person we encounter the aspect of the Creator that is within that person. We are usually unaware of this, but in every encounter with someone else we ourselves are tested. Behind this seemingly outward moral responsibility there is a wondrous phenomenon whereby a person’s behavior towards his fellow man reflects his behavior towards God.

People’s interactions seem to occur and develop on their own, but ultimately they test our behavior towards others, so that God can see whether to invite us towards Him, as it were – to the real world. It is also for this reason that the moral problem is given such a critical and central place in the Torah. (*Sod Ha-Ivri*, p. 118)

A person’s main moral test concerns his attitude and behavior towards the people who are closest to him. Very often, people are compassionate and patient towards people who have little to do with them, but fail to treat those in their closest circle as they should. People who are closest to us present a threat; they compete with us, and they are the hardest to create proper relationships with. Therefore, mankind’s first test concerned two brothers – Kayin and Hevel. Fraternity between people who are close is the greatest challenge.

**Fraternity on a National Level**

The fraternity challenge concerns not only individuals but also nations. Many of humanity’s problems arise from a reality in which two entities exist within the same space. This invites competition and jealousy, often leading to violence, since each side is fighting to defend its interests in the face of the other, which is perceived as a threat. On the national level, this dynamic manifests itself in politics, wars, and hostility between nations that view themselves as competing over territory, resources, and so on. Every political, social, or economic problem could be solved if the parties involved could view themselves as brothers. Everything would look different if nations stopped viewing each other as threats; all the resources that are wasted on war could then be used to help each other and for mutual advancement. Nations could work to solve each other’s problems.

The reason why this does not happen is the separation of politics from morality. Nations operate without thought for any moral objective; they do not aim to realize any sort of values. If they aspired towards moral improvement, they would help each other, rather than the opposite. *Am Yisrael*’s purpose is to conduct itself as a moral national entity that seeks the welfare of all nations: “All the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.” The phrase “My firstborn, Israel” means that all nations are God’s children, and there is a firstborn whose purpose is to care for them and to remind them that they are all children of the same Father.

**An Equation with Four Solutions**

As discussed, the fraternity test was the basic challenge that faced Kayin and Hevel – the only two people in the world at the time who needed to acknowledge each other’s place. Neither passed the test: Kayin became a murderer, and Hevel became a victim. Each of them, instead of pursuing the proper path of fraternity, ended up at an extreme. Manitou emphasizes that not only Kayin was at fault, but also Hevel, who immortalized his status as a passive victim, enabling his own murder. Manitou even cites a *midrash* according to which Hevel had actually managed to overcome Kayin, but Kayin begged him for mercy, and Hevel relented – and then Kayin overcame him and killed him. According to this *midrash*, the murder did not happen suddenly, taking Hevel by surprise. Hevel was aware of the danger that Kayin presented, but nevertheless yielded and knowingly chose to be passive and submissive.

In any relationship, a few different situations can be created. Kayin’s choice was to rule, and Hevel’s choice was to be submissive; these are two out of the four possibilities that Manitou enumerates. Under the heading “the fraternity equation,” he examines the relations between two seemingly unavoidable entities – “ruler” and “subordinate” – and offers four different solutions that have arisen for this equation over the course of history:

1. Totalitarian society: One possible choice is to be the ruler, while the other party will be subordinate. Here the relationship is master to servant, subject to object. This was Kayin’s choice: Since there has to be a ruler and a subject, I prefer to be the ruler. Among the different political arrangements of human society, this choice defines the totalitarian regime. It was manifest in ancient Egypt – the house of bondage – and later in Rome, in imperialist Europe, and in the twentieth century in the Communist and Nazi regimes. Among religions, this choice characterizes Islam, which aspires to impose itself on all of humanity.
2. Victimized society: Another possible choice is to be the subordinate, allowing the other to rule. Here the relationship is reversed: servant to master. This was Hevel’s choice: Since there has to be a ruler and a subordinate, I prefer to be the subordinate, a victim. Among belief systems, we encounter this worldview in pacifism and, starting much earlier, in Christianity, with its call to “turn the other cheek”. (It should be pointed out that this is the Christian position only in theory. It is practiced only by a few monks, while the Church itself has been responsible for horrific bloodshed over the generations.)
3. Mystic society: A different possibility is to be neither ruler nor subordinate, but to opt out of the social world. This possibility has not yet been implemented: Since there has to be a ruler and a subordinate, I prefer to opt out of the game. That is the only way of saving human honor and morality. The dynamics of life have to be halted because any action can lead to murder. The ideal is that everyone should be subordinates and no-one is the ruler, because domination is necessarily harmful and gives rise to struggles and wars. This mystical approach seeks to cut off ties with reality, escaping into a spiritual world. It is the fundamental tendency of the eastern religions.
4. Moral society based on Torah: to be the ruler while the other, too, is a ruler. According to Manitou, this is the approach of the Torah. I am a master and the other side is a master; I am a subject and he is a subject. Each is obligated to take care of both himself and the other. While I tend to my existential needs, I have to respect the other, give him place, and view him not as a threatening competitor but rather as a fellow creature of equal value. The Torah directs us to receive the abundant Divine blessing in reality and to share it with others.

**The Necessary Connection between Morality and Religion**

The Jewish picture of the world is a sort of triangle: At the top is God, with two people at the lower corners, two equals, peers, arising from the same Source. The most primal tendency of any creature is self-centeredness. Each wants everything for itself. Each has to learn to receive all the goodness that exists with an awareness that there is an other. Love for the other is an expression of love for the Creator.

The relationship towards the other is prompted by the common Source of all of Creation. The other is also part of the same One. God is also the God of the other, since there is only one God. The attitude towards the other is also prompted by the fact that the other, too, is created in God’s image. One who loves the other loves the Godly aspect of the other.

We see from the story of Kayin and Hevel that the attitude towards the other reflects one’s attitude towards God. Each of them approaches God in the same way that he approaches his brother. Kayin puts himself at the center, and even when he brings an offering to God, he brings it from his leftovers, while he keeps the best of his produce for himself. Hevel, in contrast, puts himself aside and offers the first and best of what he has to God. Thus, the main test – also the most common, everyday test, manifest in every area of life – lies in the sphere of interpersonal relations, which also reflects the religious sphere. One’s attitude towards the other is not merely a matter of manners; it is not just a social issue, but also a metaphysical, religious one. It is the yardstick for whether we are worthy of coming close to God in the World to Come.

Other approaches in Judaism have a different understanding of the relationship between the social and religions spheres. Some view morality as more important than religion; others view religion as more important than morality. Some focus almost exclusively on “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” while others value only “I am the Lord.” An example of the latter is Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz, who argued that in the eyes of Torah, the commandment to combat evil has value only as a religious act, not as a moral act. The commandments of the Torah, to his understanding, have no connection to the moral dimension, which is a human value. Manitou disagrees with both views, since both separate morality from religion. For Manitou, the moral reflects the religious. Religion cannot be disconnected from morality, and morality can be destructive if the attitude towards the other is not rooted in Divine Creation. This is the problem of humanism, which views the other as an absolute value in and of itself, turning the other into a sort of god.

The separation between “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” and “I am the Lord” is also reflected in the invocation of the principle “Beloved is man who was created in [God’s] image” (*Avot* 3:8), which is only a partial truth. The intention of the *mishna* is not just to tell us that the other has something special and unique about him and therefore is beloved. Rather, it goes on to quote the verse, “In the image of God He created man” (*Bereishit* 9:6). Man is created in the image of God, and this is what gives him significance. The attitude towards him is a faithful reflection of the attitude towards God.

**The Principle of Reciprocity**

As we have seen, man is required not only to avoid ruling over the other, but also to avoid being subordinated. We are not supposed to behave like Hevel, who chose to be a victim and allowed Kayin to kill him. Manitou emphasizes that the fraternity equation can be properly solved only through reciprocity. A person has to care for himself as he cares for others, and, if necessary, to protect himself from the other. “If someone comes to kill you, arise and kill him first.” If moral people lower their heads in the face of those who come to attack them, the result will be the same as what happened at the time of Kayin and Hevel: The world will be left with only the murderous side.

Manitou’s principle of reciprocity is not proposed in a vacuum. It takes issue with the teachings of Emanuel Levinas, a philosopher born to a traditional Jewish family in Lithuania, who moved to France, was active the same circles as Manitou, and achieved international renown. For Levinas, too, morality is central. But Levinas touted an asymmetrical ethic according to which my concern for the other must be independent of the other’s attitude or behavior towards me. He advocates unilateral loving-kindness and responsibility for morality, with no expectation of reciprocity. Manitou disagrees:

Here lurks the danger: When I engage in unilateral beneficence, the other is saved, but I may be lost. Does my own self not have value in and of itself? … The Torah talks about human society, and this society consists not only of righteous saints, but also of average people and also evildoers. Only on the basis of reciprocity is it possible to build a genuine moral consciousness. In social life, too, without reciprocity there is no way of implementing true morality. (*Sod Midrash Ha-Toladot* III, p. 44, footnote)

Manitou connects Levinas’s approach to the trait that characterized Avraham. Avraham, indeed, is known for his absolute beneficence, his lovingkindness to all. But *Am Yisrael* continue the legacy of all three forefathers collectively (as we shall see in future *shiurim*), not of Avraham alone. Only through the combination of their traits, making room for the other and for the self, can the nation be built up.

Translated by Kaeren Fish