YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Manitou**

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**Shiur #18 – Sanctity of the Collective**

In this *shiur*, we will continue to explore the concept of sanctity. The main focus of this *shiur* will be Manitou’s assertion that sanctity is revealed and made manifest via the collective. But first let us clarify the meaning of the concept of “sanctity.”

The idea of sanctity appears for the first time at the end of Creation, on Shabbat, when God blesses Shabbat and sanctifies it. If Shabbat is a faithful representation of sanctity, that would seem to prove that the idea of sanctity requires separating oneself from this world; after all, on Shabbat we are to set aside our profane pursuits and activities. But Manitou explains it differently: The sanctity of Shabbat comes at the end of Creation, thus representing the concluding stage of the six days of Creation – the point at which the Divine Creation achieves its purpose. Thus, the state of sanctity is not a contradiction of or in opposition to the physical world of Creation, but rather the attainment of its goal.

**A Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation**

The concept of sanctity next appears prior to the Revelation at Sinai: “And you shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Here sanctity is presented as the goal of *Am Yisrael* – and specifically as a collective, a kingdom, a nation. This principle had already been included in God’s first command to Avraham. While no mention is made there of “sanctity,” Avraham is told explicitly that his purpose is to establish a nation, not just to act as an individual. “I shall make you into a great nation… and all the families of the earth shall be blessed through you.” This is the goal of the forefathers in *Sefer* *Bereishit*, it is the essence of the process that *Am Yisrael* undergoes in *Sefer Shemot*, and it is the focus of *Sefer Vayikra* as well. The first part of *Sefer Vayikra* deals with the sacrificial service in the *Mishkan*, and the commandments there are meant mainly for the *Kohanim*, but at the heart of the *sefer* is *Parashat Kedoshim*. In presenting the vision of sanctity as a goal, the Torah addresses the entire nation: “Speak to all the congregation of *Bnei Yisrael* and say to them: You shall be holy” (19:2). This *parasha*, located in the middle of the *sefer* and containing many *mitzvot* pertaining to society and morality, indicates that the *sefer* as a whole is addressed to the collective, via which sanctity is manifest.

Sanctity cannot be revealed only through individuals; such a situation might lead to a lack of morality. An individual’s quest for sanctity might lead him to ignore his surroundings and concentrate only on his own spiritual elevation. This perception of sanctity points to a pagan worldview that attributes significance to localized, individual forces. This is not the Torah’s vision of sanctity:

The Torah takes a dim view of the “sanctity” of someone who cuts himself off from society, who is concerned for himself and only for himself – like the monks who isolate themselves and live outside of the broader social circle. The desire of such a recluse for redemption and salvation, cut off from the collective, is suspect in the eyes of the Torah and invites closer inspection. Does it proceed from a sense of superiority and pride? Does it stem from a misunderstanding of the essence of the Jewish People, and from an attitude towards Torah as just a “religion” that is concerned for the individual as an individual?

The Torah emphasizes the sanctity of the collective, the sanctity of human society in general. As a first stage, it focuses on the sanctity of the Jewish collective, which is meant to serve as a beacon of light for all of humanity. It is meant to be a collective that is based on the unification of all the attributes and all the values which we, as the Children of Israel, have inherited from the forefathers. (*Sod Midrash Ha-Toladot* III, pp. 58-61)

Since sanctity is revealed via the collective, it is not limited to specific areas. If sanctity were meant only for individuals, one might think that it is the province of those who engage in Torah and religious pursuits, while the areas of defense, agriculture, economy, culture, and the like have no connection to it. However, since all sectors and groups within the nation are part of the national mandate of holiness, the converse is also true: Holiness is (or should be) manifest in all areas in which the nation is occupied. Every area of life should be illuminated with holiness – meaning, conducted in a moral way, in accordance with the thought behind Creation, combining all values in a harmonious manner. Since the thought behind Creation is realized in the inter-personal sphere and through the unification of attributes and values, sanctity becomes manifest through all spheres of society. It takes all dimensions of life and elevates them from a natural, technical system into a living, meaningful one.

**Sanctity of the Public System**

Moreover, not only are all areas of life meant to be illuminated with sanctity, but the public sphere itself should be sanctified. Politics should be holy. The public system is a dimension in its own right and deserving of attention. In our world, the political system generally operates in a manner that is opposed to morality. The concept of the “public coffer,” for example, is the focus of much questionable behavior. People who would never dream of helping themselves to money belonging to someone else are less scrupulous when it comes to public funds. Why is this so? Because one’s impression is that the money has no defined owner, and thus that no one suffers if I take some of it.

Another factor that leads to moral problems in the public system is power struggles. Since different people and groups are active within the same public system, each tries to skew the system their own favor. There is a constant war being waged – although sometimes covert and civilized – over the allocation of shared resources. The reason for this is that in the eyes of some people, the system is meant to serve the individual, rather than to achieve public aims, and many politicians thus act to serve their own parties and interests. The public system has an overall aim and purpose; it must make room for all the different constituent groups and should express harmony. In practice, however, people fight for their own personal or sectorial interests. *Am Yisrael*, as a holy nation, should represent an entirely different view of politics. *Am Yisrael* is supposed to build a system in which all individuals are partners in creating the overall society. Like the *choshen* that the *Kohen Gadol* wears over his heart, representing the entire nation, our endeavors must take into account all the different colors comprising the whole.

The economic sphere is just one aspect of the public system; there are many more. Another example is the army. The military sphere, too, appears at first glance entirely disconnected from the moral life of the individual. The average citizen doesn’t practice shooting, but as part of this public system, he may be required to. Here, too, the Torah demands a moral standard. The demands are complex. In certain situations, the enemy must be killed: “One who comes to kill you – you take the initiative and kill him first.” But even this is a moral command, and for this reason the question of morality occupies the Israeli Army even in times of war. Indeed, from the earliest days of the return to the land and the need to defend it – among other ways, with weapons – the Jewish People has not used its weapons in a tyrannical manner, with no concern for moral questions. Instead, it has aspired all along to remain faithful to morality and is continually reviewing and evaluating its path. There may be the occasional mistake – in the direction of excessive force or excessive compassion – but the army seeks to implement the general principle of elevating the military system beyond blind, uncaring aggression.

*Am Yisrael* is supposed to set up a society in which there is no disconnect between morality and politics, unlike most societies, in which morality is the province of individuals while politics is a matter of power or law.

**The Advantage of Collective Sanctity over Individual Sanctity**

If the public sphere invites such challenges, why is it still considered to embody a higher level of sanctity than the life of an individual? First, the public sphere possesses a Divine dimension insofar as it is eternal. The concept of the individual is opposed to sanctity insofar as human life is transient, and death represents the embodiment of impurity. The actions of Avraham Avinu as an individual were transient; what makes him immortal is his founding of the nation.

Another characteristic of the collective is its inclusion of different types of people. Had *Am Yisrael* not been a nation, but rather a sect comprising individuals of faith, each joining the sect out of personal choice and conviction, it would include only *tzaddikim*. But if everyone born to *Am Yisrael* belongs to the nation regardless of his personal choice, then he might be a “*beinoni*” or even wicked – which means that the entire nation has to undergo a process of growth and development. The national collective includes everyone, not just the congregation of the faithful, as in the case of Christianity. The question of one’s Jewish identity boils down to who his or her mother is, not what he believes or does. Everyone is located somewhere on the ladder leading to the sanctity of the nation.

“R. Meir said: Either way, you are called [God’s] ‘children’” (*Kiddushin* 36a). The *halakha* follows the opinion of R. Meir. His definition is a national one. I belong to the nation of Israel because I was born to a Jewish mother; it has nothing to do with my choice or actions. The collective as a collective must elevate itself to the level of sanctity. Does this mean that the collective comprises only *tzaddikim*? Not necessarily. The word “*tzibbur*” – collective – is an acronym for “*tzaddikim*, *beinoni’im*, *u-resha’im*.” Obviously, the presence of *resha’im* is not an ideal, and we are not discussing their personal fate. Our discussion relates to a different discussion in the *gemara*, in *Massekhet Sanhedrin*, concerning whether or not the final redemption is dependent on *teshuva*. Here, too, the conclusion is that it is not; the redemption will ultimately happen, regardless. *Chazal* ruled on these questions the way they did for a reason. Their point of departure is that *Am Yisrael* is not a congregation of the faithful, but rather a nation that follows the Torah taught by Moshe, the greatest of all prophets.

On the level of *derash* we might add that the Revelation at Sinai was experienced by *resha’im*, too. According to the *midrash*, Datan and Aviram were among the taskmasters appointed over *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt, and these two individuals are depicted at every opportunity as evildoers seeking, for example, to lead the nation back to Egypt following the sin of the spies. Nevertheless, they, too, stood at Sinai; their presence did not prevent or hinder God’s Revelation. It is of critical importance that we internalize this point: When the Torah speaks of sanctity, it refers first and foremost to the mission and purpose of the collective. The nation of Israel is required to be holy. (ibid.)

**Sanctity in *Eretz Yisrael* and in Exile**

Since the concept of sanctity relates primarily to the collective and is realized in all areas of national life, *Am Yisrael* fulfills its mission only when it conducts itself as a nation and is in its land. When these two elements are missing, the sanctity that may be attained is more in the direction of asceticism and appears more like that of other religions. Manitou notes that R. Kook addresses this question in his writings. While the Torah remains the same Torah in exile, and Jews continued to practice *mitzvot* and to maintain family life (as opposed to other religions, such as Christianity, which preached celibacy), even while avoiding extreme separation, Judaism embraced this general orientation. With the return of *Am Yisrael* to its land in recent generations, the time has come for a return to the original vision of holiness set forth in the Torah – its positive dimension.

Manitou makes occasional use of the term “*perishut*” (separation, asceticism) in the context of his discussion of sanctity, but he uses it in original ways. For example, he speaks of separation from all the obstacles on the way to realization of *Am Yisrael*’s mission. Here, too, his intention is not a separation from the physical world and natural life.

*Am Yisrael* is meant to bear the standard of sanctity of the collective, serving as a “light unto the nations” and showing that a nation can conduct itself in accordance with the principles of morality and the Torah. Other nations have trouble accepting this. They identify more readily with the Christian teaching, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's,” implying that the political kingdom and God’s kingdom are separate realms (separation of Church and State). Jews, in contrast, are required to stand before the world as an example of the ideal, “You [plural] shall be holy.”

On the level of the individual, any non-Jew, any Christian, can be moral and serve as a personal example of morality. I can stand here and speak to you today thanks to the dedicated care I received from a nun who was a nurse by training and who cared for me day and night when I was injured on the frontlines in the war. She was a real heroine of kindness. But I am talking, as always, on the level of the collective. As individuals, one can find a great many non-Jews who possess real morality, and that is a very good thing. But what about the Christian nations? May we say that they serve as a shining example of morality? You are surely familiar with the saying, “Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's.” What it means is very simple: There is no connection between politics and morality. This runs completely counter to the Jewish view. It’s a dualist view. The Torah speaks to *Bnei Yisrael* and commands the nation to build up a society in which there is no disconnect between morality and politics. The emphasis is on the nation, on human society, not on a handful of monks living an artificial life, cut off from the world in some monastery. Those monks may be holy, but that isn’t what the Torah wants. It commands us, “You (plural) shall be holy” – living your real, full life within society. The command is addressed to the individual living amidst the Jewish People as a collective…

The nations of the world have trouble understanding this. Non-Jews seek spirituality “up there,” separating themselves from earthly pursuits, as they say. The deeper issue here is that they have a dualistic worldview. They are unable to overcome it and understand that it is God’s will that sanctity be manifest specifically via this world and our earthly lives. (*Sod Midrash Ha-Toladot* III, p. 161)

Manitou presents this quest in a special way. He teaches that on the seventh day of Creation, Shabbat, God ceased His creative activity in order to make space for humanity, so that human beings could bring the thought behind Creation to realization. This purpose is realized gradually over the course of history, which, like Shabbat, is given over to man. When God’s purpose is realized on the collective level, it will be time for the eighth day – the World to Come. At that time, the Torah could sum up, as it were, “And God said to man: You [plural] shall be holy; and they were holy. And God saw that it was good, and it was evening and it was morning, an eighth day.”

Translated by Kaeren Fish