YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Manitou**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #19: Sanctity and the *Mitzvot***

We now move on to the answer to a question that arises from all we have seen thus far of Manitou’s teachings.

The essential point that was clear from the first few *shiurim* was that according to Manitou, the essence of Creation – the issue that is at the heart of man’s mission – is morality. When we moved on to his view of history, we saw that at each stage there are options, and man decides how the world will proceed. Here, too, the moral sphere remains at the center. Man’s decisions and actions determine the course of history.

What we have said thus far would seem to echo cultures and worldviews outside of the world of Torah. The *Haskalah* (Enlightenment), as well as the Zionist movement, argued that Judaism’s contribution to the world consists mainly of its moral demands, while the realm of commandments between man and God are of relatively minor importance or can even be relinquished. However, this cannot be an accurate understanding of Torah, since commandments between man and God occupy a most significant and central place; the relationship between man and God extends from the beginning of Torah to the end. We will now see how Manitou’s approach differs from these views and encompasses the world of the *mitzvot*.

**Morality – Towards God As Well**

We have seen that one of the most fundamental sources of Manitou’s thought is the teachings of the Ari and his understanding of Creation as a constriction of the Infinite Light. On this basis, Manitou builds his principle that making room for the other is the foundation of the Torah. He explains that even the commandments between man and God are built on the same principle: A person has to make room for God, to make room for His Presence in one’s life, to make Him an “abode in the lower worlds,” as the *midrash* puts it. Just as a person leaves some of the produce of his own land as a gift to the poor, he gives of his produce to the *Kohen*, who serves God. The commandment of *bikkurim* requires that he bring of the fruit of his land to God, thereby making room for Him in his life, his consciousness, and his activities.

This idea finds prominent expression in two spheres – the sanctity of space and the sanctity of time. It is on these axes that man carries out the commandments between himself and God. Through these commandments, he makes God present in the world, in time, and in space.

The sanctity of Israel similarly belongs to the same principle of making room for God in the world, and this is the test of the nations: Will they allow for the manifestation of Divinity in the world through the Jewish People? Out of the entire world, there is one specific nation that serves God on behalf of all. The nations are not required to adopt Judaism and perform all the commandments between man and God. This is the role of Israel as the “heart” of the nations. Just as all Jews are not required to serve in the *Mikdash*, as the *kohanim* do (but instead give of their produce to support the *kohanim* so that the *kohanim* can perform their task), so the nations are meant to make room for *Am Yisrael*, but not to try to adopt their role. Aside from this test of making room for *Am Yisrael*, the other nations are not required to do any particular action to make room for God in the world. That is Israel’s job. When the other nations try to create religions similar to the Torah and to build parallel systems for the relationship between man and God, that creates distortions.

As an example, Manitou cites the archetype of the relationship of the nations of the world towards Israel – Kayin vs. Hevel. The challenge facing Kayin and Hevel was in the moral sphere, but the story centers on their sacrifices. This is the result of Kayin’s choice to redirect the focus from the moral sphere to the “religious” sphere (between man and God). The initiative of bringing a sacrifice is born out of a desire to evade and escape the moral sphere (between man and his fellow man). Kayin does not want to deal with his own real challenge. But both challenges exist, and they share the same basis. Kayin was not commanded to bring any sacrifice; this was not required of him. He tries to imitate the sacrifice brought by Hevel, but he is unsuccessful. Therefore, God tells him to desist from “religious” activity and to concentrate instead on the real repair that he is called upon to undertake: “If you act well, shall it not be lifted up?”

It is not the job of the nations of the world to address the religious problem – for the simple reason that every time they try to do so, it ends in disaster. The fiercest wars that have taken place between nations were caused by differences of “religion” between the nations. The Torah recounts what happened in the generation of Enosh, when “men began to call upon the name of the Lord.” Instead of turning to the Master of the universe Himself, they began to address themselves to intermediaries, and this was the beginning of idolatry. One dare not mistake one’s mission. The nations of the world are entrusted with solving the moral problem, not the “religious” one – this is Israel’s job. Israel serves as the “*kohen*,” not the other nations. This assertion in no way reflects arrogance. Israel is referred to in the Torah as God’s “firstborn son,” but this does not mean, heaven forfend, that the other nations are not His children, too. (*Sod Midrash Ha-Toladot* III, pp. 248-252)

Manitou explains that the *beit midrash* of Shem and Ever was divided into two “tracks” – that of Shem and that of Ever. Shem was responsible for the man-God realm – “he (Yafet) shall dwell in the tents of Shem.” His job is to make God’s Presence manifest in reality. Ever was the first person since Kayin and Hevel who has the word “*ach*” (brother) appearing repeated in the text with reference to him. This hints to the fact that his job is to restore fraternity to the world.

**Morality Towards Oneself**

Many *mitzvot* demand some explanation in light of the above principle. Consider, for example, all the forbidden foods listed in the Torah. How is this body of *mitzvot* connected to the idea of making room for others? How are we to explain all the various types of forbidden sexual relationships? Committing adultery with someone else’s wife is certainly a moral transgression against both families, but incestuous relationships, for example, do not seem to harm anyone. Are these *mitzvot* considered to belong to the realm of inter-personal relationships or to the realm between man and God?

Manitou’s answer is that there is another category of *mitzvot*: Those that are between a person and himself. The most obvious spheres belonging to this category are the various forbidden foods and the forbidden sexual unions. When a person eats, it affects and impacts first and foremost himself, and thus the laws of prohibited foods belong to the realm “between man and himself.”

What is the significance of this category? Why is a person’s concern for himself a moral command? When a person needs to advance the world towards its ultimate perfection, in line with the Divine thought behind Creation, he needs to advance himself, too, so that he himself matches the thought behind Creation. We might say that the category of *mitzvot* “between man and himself” means “involving man and his essence.” A person has to make room within himself for the perfected man that he is destined to be. He must designate resources to realize his potential and to grow the Divine image within him.

This category includes many *mitzvot* that people mistakenly consider to be “religious” commands [i.e., between man and God], while they actually belong to the realm that is “between man and himself.” They are “identity” *mitzvot*, if we may refer to them thus. *Mitzvot* relating to food – *kashrut* – *mitzvot* pertaining to the relations between man and wife – procreation – all of these belong to the category of *mitzvot* that are between man and himself, his essence. (ibid.)

These three groups of *mitzvot* – between man and his fellow man, between man and God, and between man and himself – are not just three areas of life, but also three relationships that man maintains simultaneously: vis-à-vis the other, vis-à-vis God, and vis-à-vis the perfection that is required of him. The thought behind Creation informs and guides all three.

**Three Dimensional Morality**

Manitou adheres to his principle that the focus of the Torah is morality, but in contrast to schools outside of Judaism, he maintains that morality extends further than just the inter-personal realm. Other schools of thought treat morality, religiosity, and the self as separate realms, while in the Torah all are intertwined. The Torah preaches a three-dimensional morality.

In addition, Manitou argues that each of the commandments comprises all three dimensions. A transgression against another person involves an offense to God as well as an offense to one’s own essence. Sometimes one or other dimension may be dominant, such that identifying all the dimensions of the mitzva requires some analysis. There are differences in this regard between the various *mitzvot*, and also during different periods. In exile, for example, the man-God dimension was more prominent. In more recent generations, the interpersonal dimension has come to occupy greater prominence, and today the realm of a person’s own essence has become a very powerful focus.

Holiness can be achieved only if the moral problem is solved. *Chazal* describe the human history of the “seventh day” as consisting of two thousand years of *derekh* *eretz* [“the way of the world,” i.e., the basic foundation of human existence], two thousand years of Torah, and two thousand years of *Mashiach*. This description parallels the three dimensions embodied in the *mitzvot* of the Torah: between man and his fellow, between man and God, and between man and himself. Whenever I speak about Torah, I say that Torah is the ultimate moral legal system, and the reason for this is that it includes simultaneously all of these three dimensions. Each mitzva includes three dimensions, but in each case the emphasis is on one or the other. (ibid.)

*Chazal* offer different responses to the question of the identity of the “great principle of the Torah.” The best-known is “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”; another that is well known is “This is the book of the generations of man.” There is another opinion in the *midrash* that is cited in the introduction to *Ein Yaakov*: “The one lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other you shall offer at dusk.” These three principles parallel the three dimensions: between man and his fellow man, between man and himself, and between man and God. Similarly, the Maharal explains the three pillars upon which the world stands (*Avot* 1:2): “Upon service” refers to the *mitzvot* between man and God; “upon loving-kindness” refers to the interpersonal realm; and “upon Torah” refers to a person’s attitude towards and interaction with his own essence, since the Torah helps a person to build up and perfect himself. The three cardinal sins likewise parallel these three realms – idolatry (man-God), bloodshed (man and his fellow), and sexual immorality (man and himself, as explained above) – and these correspond to Torah, service, and loving-kindness. These are the three areas in which a person is required to bring morality to realization.

Translated by Kaeren Fish