YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**The Philosophy of Manitou**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

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**We mourn the sudden passing of our dear friend and supporter**

**Mr. Joshua Mermelstein z"l  
and extend our deepest sympathies to his mother,  
his wife Beth, and his children Avi, Jesse and Jonah.  
May the family know no more sorrow.**  
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**Shiur #21: The Torah of the Father and the Torah of the Rav**

In the previous *shiur*, we examined the distinction that Manitou draws between the Torah of Moshe and the Torah of Aharon – or, to put it differently, the teaching of perfection of the world and the teaching of atonement. In this *shiur*, we will address another important distinction – between the “Torah of the father" and the “Torah of the Rav."

Manitou dictated this fragment to one of his students during his illness, three months before his death, and it was published as an appendix to his book *Sod Ha-Ivri*. The fact that he saw fit to dictate this section would seem to indicate the importance that he attached to it. At the same time, owing to his condition at the time, this section is not as clear as the rest of his writings. Excerpts from elsewhere in his works help to shed more light on it.

**The Three Forefathers vs. Moshe**

Who are the "father" and the "Rav"? If we try to identify the concrete biblical figures represented by these titles, the "father" would seem to refer to the three forefathers, while the "Rav" refers to Moshe.

We have already discussed the reason why we have three forefathers and not just one: The three complement each other, each introducing and embodying a different attribute, and the harmony among them is what creates the totality of the Israelite identity. Each of the forefathers represents the absolute expression of one particular trait, but not the perfection of wholeness. This is achieved only by the unification of their attributes.

Moshe is a single individual. The Torah testifies that he was special and unique and that no one like him has ever arisen. Nevertheless, as Manitou points out, we do not refer to God as "the God of Moshe," but rather "the God of our forefathers – the God of Avraham, the God of Yitzchak, and the God of Yaakov." Only the Torah is called "the Torah of Moshe.” What does this tell us?

The forefathers are our patriarchs, our "parents," who brought the Jewish People into existence. Moshe is our "teacher"; he brought us the Torah. The importance of the forefathers for our identity is principally in their "parental" status; anyone who is descended from them is part of the Jewish People. With regard to Moshe, on the other hand, a biological or genetic link to him is irrelevant (unlike, for example, the dynastic, inherited status of *Kohanim* or kings). Our connection is to his Torah. Moshe had sons, but they did not leave their mark for all future generations. Conversely, the forefathers had disciples – "the souls that they made in Charan" – but those disciples had no continuity. The forefathers created the Jewish People, and Moshe was an individual born to the Jewish People who brought Torah to his people. The forefathers built the body of the nation, while Moshe invested it with its soul and spirit; he gave it its direction. Thus, the identity of *Am Yisrael* consists of two layers: the anthropological Israelite identity (by virtue of the fact that we are descendants of Avraham Ha-Ivri) and the cultural-religious level (by virtue of the giving of the Torah).

**Potential Identity and Actual Identity**

 The above might seem to suggest that the forefathers have no connection to Torah, that they molded only the most basic, physical identity of the nation. However, we see that there is such a thing as a "teaching of the forefathers":

What blessing does one recite: "… Who has sanctified us with His commandments and has commanded us to kindle Chanuka light.” Where were we so commanded? R. Avira said: We derive this from the commandment, “You shall not deviate from their teachings…” R. Nechemia said: [We derive it from the verse,] “Ask your father and he shall teach you; your grandfather – and he shall say to you.’" (*Shabbat* 23a)

The *gemara* is seeking the source of rabbinically-ordained commandments (in this instance, lighting Chanuka candles, which commemorates historical events that took place long after the biblical period, and thus is obviously not mentioned anywhere in the Torah). Two different possible answers are suggested. One is the commandment "you shall not deviate" – the obligation to obey the teachings and injunctions of the Sages, who represents the continuation of Moshe. The other possible source is the verse, "Ask your father and he shall tell you" – the obligation to remain loyal to the tradition of the forefathers. Torah is transmitted not only by *rabbanim* – teachers – but also by parents.

It is perhaps no coincidence that this discussion is recorded in the *gemara* in the context of Chanuka, commemorating our victory over the Syrian-Greeks, who understood that both the Sages and the tradition of generations were channels for transmitting Jewish identity and values, and that they therefore would have to attack on both fronts. Moreover, the fundamental command regarding the transmission of Torah is "and you shall teach them diligently to your children" – meaning that Torah is transmitted first and foremost in the family context, from fathers to sons. The main institution for passing on Torah is parenthood.

Manitou quotes R. Hutner on the difference between the role of the father and that of the rabbi:

"The God of our forefathers” – We have an inheritance from our forefathers, the natural mentoring that made us a receptacle to receive the Torah of Moshe… Through the father, this capacity is created “in potential”; through the rabbi it is created “in actuality.”  The “potential” is actually more important, and therefore “the mundane conversation of the servants of the forefathers is preferable to the teachings of their children."

The forefathers gave us not only a biological connection, but also our fundamental attributes. They molded our unique identity. We could not have arrived at the Revelation at Sinai without all of *Sefer Bereishit* and the whole process of the molding of our identity. Once that identity has been created, it must find practical expression in the world, in every sphere and in every situation. For this we needed the Torah of Moshe, and it comes to guide and direct the identity that we received from the forefathers. Torah represents the path to realization of our identity and our connection to and encounter with the God of our forefathers. The Torah that is transmitted from fathers to sons is our basic identity; the Sages teach us how to implement it and bring it to realization.

The concept of the “*segula* of Israel” refers to the basic qualities of *Am Yisrael*, existing in anyone who is a descendant of the three forefathers. It was on the basis of this “*segula*” that *Am Yisrael* received the Torah. One of the innovative aspects of Manitou's teaching in this regard is that the *segula* is not merely a static given; rather, it is an identity that is continually developing. The role of the fathers is to nurture and build it.

God's choice of *Am Yisrael* precedes the choice of the Torah. The nation that receives the Torah is not a tabula rasa, but rather a nation that was designated for a special purpose from the start: "Through you shall all the families of the earth be blessed." This nation receives the Torah in order to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

*Am Yisrael* by its very makeup has an affinity for the Torah. The Torah is given because from the time of the forefathers, an identity has gradually been formed, becoming the nation that is redeemed from Egypt. The Torah is given by Moshe, but the content and substance of the Torah is a translation of the attributes of the forefathers into the form of *mitzvot*.

One of the most prominent expressions of the Torah of the forefathers is the fact that the *mitzva* of Torah study appears first as a command to teach Torah, and this obligation is incumbent first and foremost on the father, rather than the teacher: "And you shall teach them diligently to your children.”

**The Test of the Two Layers – The Sin of the Golden Calf and Christianity**

This principle comes to the fore in the episode of the golden calf. This sin occurs after the giving of the Torah, in which Moshe was the dominant figure. He becomes overly significant in the eyes of the people, who transform him from a "teacher" into a "father.” They perceive him as a single individual who stands alone as their leader and model – which is precisely the idea that the model of the three forefathers was meant to negate. When there is a single, sole leader, the result will be a blurring of the boundary between him and God, who sent him and in whose name he acts: "Arise, make us a god that will go before us, for this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt – we do not know what has become of him."

There is always a danger that the Sender will be forgotten and only the emissary will remain. In his commentary on the *Haggada*, the Vilna Gaon comments on the fact that no mention is made of Moshe. Concerning the words, "I – and not an emissary," he writes: "Emissary – this alludes to Moshe Rabbeinu", since there is a danger of misunderstanding and misinterpretation, leading to the conclusion that "this Moshe, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt…" (*Shemot* 32:1) – i.e., that it was Moshe who brought us out of Egypt, rather than God Himself. (*Torat Ha-Av Ve-Torah Ha-Rav, Sod Ha-Ivri* I, pp. 209-213)

After the sin, God speaks of annihilating *Am Yisrael* and establishing a new nation from Moshe. The intention here is not that Moshe will be the forefather of the nation, but rather a whole new conception. Instead of a nation descended from and identified with the forefathers, there will be a community centered around the Torah that is learned from the teacher. This community would be based solely on faithful adherence to Torah; anyone who sinned would be excluded. Moshe rejects this idea and fights to maintain the framework of *Am Yisrael* – an identity that is inclusive of all descendants of the forefathers. When Moshe descends from Mount Sinai, he fulfills his role in transmitting the Torah via his disciples, the tribe of Levi, who help him to halt and eradicate the sin and to restore order. But in his prayer he makes no mention of this; he does not ask to spare and continue only with the disciples who follow his teachings. He asks that *Am Yisrael* remain as the entire nation that is identified with the forefathers and that receives the Torah on this basis. When this nation sins, its connection with God is not broken.

Manitou identifies these two models with Judaism and Christianity. The basis of *Am Yisrael* is a hereditary, national identity, while the basis of Christianity is a community of believers. *Am Yisrael* is not a "congregation of believers in the religion of Moshe" that includes only the faithful, as in the case of Christianity, in which belonging is dependent on religious practice (or profession of religious faith); belonging to *Am Yisrael* is not dependent on this.

This foundation sheds light on Christianity's rejection of the *mitzvot* and confession for atonement. The moment that one adopts the "teacher" model exclusively, with no preceding anthropological identity prior to Torah (the "father"), sin causes a person to lose his belonging. Thus, it becomes necessary to nullify the *mitzvot*; otherwise, no one will be able to maintain his standing over time. The Jewish view, in which there is room even for sinners because they are part of the nation, allows for the *mitzvot* to remain in force. It is not by chance that the Torah addresses itself to a nation, a "*tzibbur*" – *tzaddikim*, *benonim*, and *resha'im*. A religion, on the other hand, has no room for *benonim* and *resha'im*.

The sects and breakaway religions all start by replacing the father with the teacher. Every religion has a founder, and his disciples are counted as the believers in that religion. (The most extreme expression of this is to be found in Catholicism, which frowns on marriage, thereby cutting off the connection to the father.) *Am Yisrael* has its founders, and their descendants are all counted as Jews. The Torah is a national Torah, given to the descendants of the forefathers, not to the disciples of the teacher. One of the important ramifications of this principle is that even someone who does not follow the path of Torah is still part of the nation and a member of the community.

The concept that Moshe rejected is one that became the basis for Christianity. The Christians nullified national identity, the existence of a nation descended from the forefathers, adopting instead a religious model in which people choose whether or not to accept the teachings. In such a format, anyone who sins is cast out. Therefore, the Christians claimed that *Am Yisrael* had lost its role.

The Christian approach was raised just once in the history of *Am Yisrael* – with the nation's first sin, the sin of the golden calf. At this point, God, as it were, raised the possibility of nullifying the choice of *Am Yisrael* and replacing them with a religion-based community. This was the fundamental question that arose after the sin: Would the sin cancel their identity and their belonging? Would the model of "the Torah of the father" disappear, leaving only "the Torah of the teacher"? The answer, ultimately, was that the Torah of the teacher would remain a second layer over and above the teaching of the father; there could be no severance from the chain going back to the forefathers. A child, no matter what, always remains the child of his parents.

In terms of the attribute of justice, what God should have done, Heaven forfend, is to erase *Am Yisrael* and to establish a religion, since *Am Yisrael* had failed. But Moshe understood that God did not wish to discontinue the connection to the forefathers. And this refutes the teachings of the Church, which sought to replace *Am Yisrael* as a nation with a congregation of believers – a religion. This was the beginning of their apostasy, for the positioning of a teacher in the role of the father is called heresy. (ibid.)

There are other expressions of the relationship between these two layers. One example is the relationship between Pesach and Shavuot. The Exodus from Egypt precedes the Giving of the Torah. First there appears the Israelite identity (via the *mitzvot* surrounding the Pesach sacrifice, which is closely bound up with the home and the family); only afterwards comes the Torah. In the conversion process as well, the convert first joins *Am Yisrael* and only afterwards accepts upon himself Torah and *mitzvot* – first circumcision, which began with Avraham, and afterwards the *mitzvot* that we received via Moshe. As Ruth expresses it: "Your nation is my nation, and your God is my God." It could have been possible that someone coming from the outside, who is not a descendant of the forefathers, could only join the "Torah of the teacher," but in the case of Jewish identity, there can be no separation of the two elements. Therefore, the convert first assumes membership in the nation and then, in addition, his commitment and belonging to the Torah of Moshe.

Translated by Kaeren Fish