YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**The Philosophy of Manitou**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #17 – Sanctity**

We now approach the subject of sanctity. We will begin by examining the core of the subject as treated in Manitou's teachings. Thereafter, we will address some important complementary issues.

**Sanctity in Judaism vs. Sanctity in Pagan and Mystical Cultures**

Sanctity is a goal in Judaism: "You shall be holy…” (*Vayikra* 19:2). We might say that this is, in fact, the purpose of Judaism, and hence it is important that we understand its essence.

Among the other nations, sanctity is generally perceived in one of two ways. One is the pagan approach, which selects certain phenomena or entities in the world and treats them as gods. Interestingly, Manitou chooses Christianity as an example, even though Christianity is a rather advanced version of paganism, and not the epitome of this ancient worldview. He points to an element of Christianity that reflects its manifestly pagan nature: the Mass. This ceremony, in which the believer is symbolically fed, as it were, from the flesh of his god and drinks of his blood, is an expression of the pagan worldview that is the foundation of Christianity. Ingesting these consecrated substances causes the physical, material aspect of man to become holy; this is his way of sanctifying himself.

The pagan worldview entails magical actions that force the gods, as it were, to extend their sanctity to man. The eating of a wafer symbolizing the flesh of god serves as a technical means for man to obtain some share of the sanctity of the gods.

The other, opposite approach is mysticism. This trend towards extreme spirituality rejects any connection with the physical world. It negates man's physical aspect, his connection to society, and his sense of self. It is only when a person nullifies himself and negates any connection with the world that there is any possibility of making contact with the spiritual world.

Both options are negative, but there are concepts and phenomena within Judaism that appear similar to each of them, and thus we must take care to understand them properly. For instance, what do we mean when we say that a *sefer* *Torah* has sanctity? If we reject pagan belief completely, how can Halakha attribute sanctity to physical objects? At the same time, if we reject the idea of withdrawal from the world, how are we to understand Rashi's interpretation of the command "You shall be holy" as "You shall be separated"? Does Judaism not agree that the world includes some very problematic ideas and phenomena and that one has to withdraw and seclude oneself in order to achieve sanctity? Having rejected both poles, these two directions as they exist within Judaism demand careful and meticulous treatment, so as not to lead us to a perverted understanding that is close to paganism, on the one hand, or extreme asceticism, on the other.

Indeed, many sages over the generations have addressed these dimensions of sanctity, mainly in an attempt to clarify what is truly holy and what is pagan or mystical in the negative sense. Some of them focused on sanctification of the physical world, explaining the difference between this and paganism, while others focused on separation from the physical world and explained how this is different from all-encompassing mysticism. In general, we might say that the sages who tended towards Kabbala belong to the first group, while those who tended more towards philosophy belong to the second.

Manitou takes a completely different approach. Negation of the two extreme poles does not lead him to a clarification and moderation of the directions in Judaism that resemble these trends, even though such instruction certainly has its place. Instead, he points to a third possibility, altogether different from either of the two directions that exist in the non-Jewish world.

**"You Shall be Holy" – With the Type of Holiness that is Suited to You**

Manitou's fundamental principle is that there is no connection between the sanctity that a person can achieve and the holiness of God. At first, this prompts an immediate question: God commands us explicitly, "You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." The interpretation that Manitou offers is, "I (God) am holy with My holiness; you (Israel) shall be holy with your holiness." The verse does not mean to tell us that we must be holy "like God," but rather that we must be holy in the manner that is suited to us. What does this mean? It means living in accordance with the purpose of Creation. Thus, the command is not "Be like God," but rather "Be like God wants you to be" – live the way God intended in His plan for Creation (as discussed in our previous *shiurim*).

This is a very different view from all we have said thus far about sanctity. Manitou does not accept either of the two main directions in this regard – the first because it adopts an ideal of sanctity that is obviously impossible to achieve and the second because it is clear to him that holiness must be expressed within the world (as arising from a simple reading of the Torah), not through severance from it. The commandments are to be practiced in this world, and the forefathers held up as role models for *Am Yisrael* are active within the world. Even Moshe, the greatest of all prophets who achieved the highest level of spiritual awareness, is the this-worldly leader of *Am Yisrael*, dealing with them from morning until night. With the exception of a few individuals, such as Chanokh – who is not a central figure in the Torah and is perhaps deliberately given only minor mention (it was only during periods of crisis for the Jewish People that books were written about him) – all great Jewish figures are active in the varied realms of this world. It is in this arena that the sanctity of the commandments in *Parashat Kedoshim* – and in fact throughout the Torah – becomes manifest.

**Sanctity through Morality**

In light of the above, we must ask: How does sanctity find expression in the world? Unsurprisingly, Manitou argues that it is expressed in the moral realm. This approach is quite different from the one that extolls separation and seclusion, requiring that a person cut himself off from society and causing him to be absent from the sphere in which morality is practiced. As opposed to separation, which is fundamentally a negation, Manitou proposes that sanctity is a positive call to action.

But morality is only the foundation for the level of sanctity. Sanctity means realizing the purpose of Creation. From the moment God finished creating the world, it has functioned as a natural, mechanical system. It is a silent world, offering man two possibilities: either to exploit it for his own purposes or to expose the Divinity within it. Sanctity means turning the natural, static, dry world into a world that is alive and personal. It means not becoming like God, but rather become a living, meaningful Divine creation:

The Holy One, blessed be He, put in the world all that was needed so that man could fulfill this mission. Before ceasing His work, God blesses the world: “And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it.” The blessing that exists within Creation allows man to carry out his task. Man faces two alternatives: The first is to accept the state that the world is in, to enjoy the world and enjoy the blessing that exists within it, without making any special effort to transcend this “natural” situation. The second – that which the Creator of the world expects of man as His partner – is to use the blessing in Creation in order to transcend natural life, to elevate the entire world, all of Creation, to its true level as envisioned in the thought behind Creation. (*Sod Midrash Ha-Toladot* III, pp. 55-56)

This requires much work – and it is this that distinguishes the Jewish view of sanctity from the magical view, in which man tries to draw spirituality towards himself without exerting any effort. It is only through active engagement that the world can become alive and Godly.

**Sanctity through Unification of Attributes**

Manitou points out additional meaning in the concept of sanctity, which connects to the subject of our previous *shiur*. He cites a *midrash* that describes the state of humanity prior to the Tower of Bavel initiative as “of a single language and few words.” According to one opinion, everyone spoke seventy languages, while according to a different opinion they all spoke the same, single language of the “Only One [God] of the world.” Manitou explains that these are two sides of the same coin: The holy tongue is the only language that can make room for all others. Harmony among the seventy different facets can be facilitated only through that which unifies them. This is an important part of the significance of holiness – it transforms the world into a place where the unification of attributes becomes manifest. As we have seen in previous *shiurim*, *Am Yisrael* must live this unity, and for this reason the nation is founded on the three forefathers. As the next stage, *Am Yisrael* must be a beacon of light for all nations, unifying all of humanity:

The main innovation of the Torah is its emphasis on the sanctity of the collective. The collective qua collective must achieve a level of sanctity, and this begins with the Jewish People, insofar as they are a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” The Torah’s quest for a human society in which all attributes, all values, are realized together, in perfect harmony, even though they are contradictory, is altogether revolutionary. This is man’s task: not “man” in the sense of some or other individual, but rather “man” in the sense of “mankind.” (ibid.)

This, then, is the human edifice as Manitou depicts it: The first level is morality, above that is the unification of attributes, and through this the top level – sanctity – is achieved.

Translated by Kaeren Fish