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 #20: Moshe's Torah and Aharon's Torah**

We continue our discussion of the *mitzvot* and their essential nature and significance according to Manitou. Let us begin by recalling one of the foundations that we encountered at the beginning of our journey, concerning the Creation of the world. According to Manitou, God deliberately created the world deficient so that man would have the task of completing and perfecting it. The thought behind Creation is whole and complete – i.e., Creation is supposed to look a certain way – but there is a gap between this Divine primal thought and actual Creation. The axis of history is a progression from reality as it is towards reality as it should be. The world was deliberately created deficient so that man can exert his own efforts to bring it to completion; thus, the work and striving for completion and perfection are integral to man.

Manitou notes the possibility of a different perspective: One might argue that God created the world perfect and that man damaged it. Since then, man has been tasked with fixing that which he corrupted. Manitou explains that this view is taken to its extreme by Christianity. According to Christian doctrine, man damaged the world beyond repair, and he is forever filled with remorse over this. This view causes man to feel hopeless, as though all is lost. According to Judaism, man's mission is to repair the world, and this was his task from the outset. This is also the aim of the Torah: to instruct man how to repair the world and its deficiencies, which did not start with man. By means of Torah, the world is elevated from deficiency to perfection. Torah builds an entire system of repair – between man and his fellow man, between man and God, and between man and himself. The entire system of *mitzvot* is aimed at man's relationship with God, with his environment, and with himself, and advances them towards perfection.

**Torah of Repair and Torah of Atonement**

Over the lengthy course of the process of repair, mankind also commits transgressions. This is a natural and unavoidable corollary of man's mission; only someone who never does anything will never make mistakes. Man took on a difficult, complex, and lengthy mission, and there will be some wrong turns and bad decisions along the way: "For there is not a righteous man upon earth who does good and does not sin" (*Kohelet* 7:20). This is not meant as legitimization for sinning – certainly not intentionally – but it does explain that sin is inescapably part of man's activity. We have no wish to transgress and we try to avoid wrongdoing, but we know that it happens. Therefore, the Torah must necessarily include a dimension of atonement. Atonement is not the central issue in life – a person is not meant to be always occupied with his sins – but it is a necessary auxiliary area for achieving man's real purpose, which is the repair of the world:

Unfortunately, today we find a tendency among certain rabbis to place the emphasis on atonement; for them the overall ideal of repair becomes secondary. This is a dangerous situation, because such approaches are foreign to Judaism. When one has sinned, one must make atonement, but the world was not created for the sake of sins and atonement! The world was created so that man can earn his place in it by perfecting the world, by means of his labor "which God created to do." When man is engaged in that mission of perfecting the world, as a servant of God, he will sometimes stumble and sin, and then he needs atonement – but all of this is of secondary importance. God did not ask for sin in the first place so that man will engage in atonement. Rather, He tells man: Obey Me, behave as I command you, in a moral manner, as is written in the Torah. And if there is some irregularity, then atonement is necessary. The [ultimate] purpose is the repair, not the atonement. (*Sod Midrash Ha-Toladot* I, p. 254)

This view helps to explain some verses of prophecy that at first glance are difficult to understand:

So says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt-offerings to your sacrifices, and eat flesh. For I did not speak to your forefathers, nor command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices; but this thing I commanded them, saying: “Obey Me, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.” (*Yirmiyahu* 7:21-23)

On the face of it, these verses tell us that God did not command us to offer sacrifices, which would seem to go against all of *Sefer Vayikra*. But what they are actually saying is not that there was never any commandment concerning sacrifices, but rather that God did not command sacrifices at the time of the Exodus. The prophet draws our attention to the fact that neither the Ten Commandments nor *Parashat Mishpatim* makes any mention of sacrifice; this appears only after the sin of the golden calf. At the giving of the Torah on Sinai, God gave *Am Yisrael* a mission: to be a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation," to repair the world. A nation that is busy carrying out its mission is not meant to transgress, and therefore should not have to devote much time or attention to repairing sins. However, the episode of the golden calf shows that the nation is susceptible to sinning.

We might compare the situation to a commander who sets off with his soldiers on an important mission, with all his focus on the operational level. But suddenly he finds himself having to deal with disciplinary issues. His first reaction might be to abort the mission entirely, because the unit he has with him is not up to the job. "Now therefore let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may consume them" (*Shemot* 32:10) – not as a punishment, but rather as the drawing of a logical conclusion: The nation is seemingly not capable of fulfilling its mission. But then a different resolution appears – the existence of a dimension of atonement in *Am Yisrael* through the sacrifices brought to the Temple. This is the essence of *Sefer Vayikra* – the ways of atoning for sin.

Manitou calls these two different approaches "the Torah of Moshe" and "the Torah of Aharon." The Torah of Moshe is the ideal conveyed at the giving of Torah at Sinai; the Torah of Aharon is the dimension of atonement.

All of this accords with the opinion of Rashi, who maintains that the command to build the *Mishkan* was given only after the sin of the golden calf (i.e., that the record of these events in the Torah does not follow their chronological order). However, even according to the opinion of Ramban – who argues that the text reflects the chronological order of events, and the command to build the *Mishkan* was given before the episode of the golden calf – it seems that the *Mishkan* has two different dimensions to it. In *Sefer Shemot*, the *Mishkan* is discussed as a resting place for the Divine Presence, while in *Sefer Vayikra* it functions as a place of atonement. Manitou draws our attention to a teaching of R. Charlap (*Mei Marom*, *Sichot* on *Sefer Shemot* 78), noting that in *Parshat Tetzaveh* there is no mention of Moshe, while *Parashat Teruma* makes no mention of Aharon. This would seem to indicate a differentiation between the "Torah of Moshe" and the "Torah of Aharon" inherent already in the *parashot* commanding the construction of the *Mishkan*, preceding the account of the golden calf. Even at this early stage, the Torah prepares us for the *Mishkan* with its two distinct functions.

How is the Torah divided into these two different perspectives? Do all the *mitzvot* with the exception of those pertaining to sacrifice relate to the task of perfecting the world, or are there other *mitzvot* which also pertain to atonement? We do find occasional mention of aspects of atonement in other *mitzvot*, and it is possible that both dimensions exist in all the *mitzvot*. For instance, both are manifest in the *mitzva* of *tzitzit*. On the one hand, *tzitzit* has the aspect of a priestly garment that all of Israel are commanded to wear (recalling, both in its name and in the blue dye, the *tzitz* worn by the *Kohen Gadol*); on the other hand, *tzitzit* is presented as a way of combatting the temptations of the heart and the eyes, and it appears in the Torah only after the debacle of the spies. In the same way, we must seek and understand both of these aspects in all the *mitzvot*.

The main thrust is the Torah of Moshe. It is only after the fact that the sacrificial service is revealed as a means of atonement; originally, the sacrifices were meant as a service of thanksgiving. In the time to come, all the sacrifices will cease, except for the thanksgiving offering. The main idea is to work on perfection, not atonement. I do not perceive the religious soul of Judaism as concerning mainly mourning and atonement. That would be a monstrous world! These elements do not grasp the joy of performing *mitzvot*. (ibid.)

Here Manitou emphasizes that even the sacrifices themselves embody both dimensions. The sin offering belongs to the dimension of atonement, but offerings of thanksgiving do not arise from sin or the need to atone for it.

Translated by Kaeren Fish