

Holiness in the Thought of RAL

Class 17

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1. R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, p. 47

Holiness is created by man, by flesh and blood. Through the power of our mouths, through verbal sanctification alone, we can create holy offerings of the Temple treasury and holy offerings for the altar. The land of Israel became holy through conquest, Jerusalem and the Temple courts – through bringing two loaves of thanksgiving... It is man who sanctifies space and makes a sanctuary for his Creator.

2. R. Aharon Lichtenstein, “Joseph Soloveitchik,” *Great Jewish Thinkers of the Twentieth Century*, pp. 293-4

In Halakhah nothing is sacred but man literally makes it so... While the regimen of Halakhah provides the necessary forms, it leaves to the initiative of man's creative spirit the vital task of infusing these forms with meaningful content.

3. “Be Holy for I am Holy,” *Seeking His Presence*, p. 136-52

We can speak of a certain type of holiness that is manifest in different objects. One can sanctify some objects and not others... There is another level of sanctity at which one can begin to speak of different kinds of sanctity. The discrepancy lies not in different laws, but in the distinct types of sanctity. For example... the sanctity of the Sabbath as opposed to the festivals. Would one claim that they possess the same sanctity?...

therefore, when dealing with a subject as wide-ranging and varied as holiness, one must begin by mapping out the relevant halakhic realms. First, to what does sanctity apply, and to what does it not apply. Second, when it does apply, one must understand the relationship between the different entities to which it applies. When holiness does not apply, we must understand why not...

The concept of holiness generally refers to that which is unique and separate. The primary, and broader, sense of the term is uniqueness, while the secondary sense is separateness, which has various semantic applications. *Hazal* often interpreted the term “holy” in the Bible as referring to something being separate...

it seems to me that there are two basic approaches one can take to the concept of sanctity. As I have already noted, sanctity, or holiness, is defined as something that possesses a unique status.

One can say that a sanctified object has certain intrinsic characteristics, and that is why specific laws apply to it. conversely, one may say that specific laws apply to an object and that therefore these laws differentiate it from other objects. For example, the fact that a *kohen* and a *Nazir* are not allowed to become impure through contact with a dead person effectively removes them from this aspect of life. This separation, this delineation, creates sanctity.

If one considers holiness from the second perspective, then the laws of separation themselves bring about the sanctity – then of course one must differentiate between that which is prohibited and that which is sacred.

Although there are foods which are forbidden because we are holy, and the food itself is impure metaphysically or halakhically, we must bear in mind that prohibition and sanctity are distinct concepts...

The sanctity of the person, object, or the time *characterizes* the status of that person or that object or that time. Pigs and rabbits do not have an essentially unholy character, other than the fact that the Torah forbids us to eat them, but there are other things that do have an intrinsically holy or sacred character...

First of all, when we speak of the sanctity of an object, we recognize that there may be prohibitions in regard to the object. These prohibitions do not reflect a diminished status, but rather an elevated one. Secondly, we understand that this status reflects a certain reality. This object is somehow elevated above our material world...

From a religious perspective, we can speak of holiness as being manifest in the elevated status of a person or group. How can such a thing be? It comes from having a connection to the Almighty...

In the case of a sacrificial animal, a person is certainly able to create sanctity, by designating the animal as a sacrifice. Once an object has been sanctified by human agency, then one can apply this sanctity to other objects...

You asked where sanctity comes from. There are two approaches.

One perspective is that holiness flows from above. The Almighty creates sanctity, He manifests sanctity, and He transmits of His sanctity to some of the matter He created, and to which the halakha has accorded sanctity. The other approach is that sanctity is created primarily by man, that man has been authorized by the Almighty, by the Torah, by the halakha, to create sanctity...

Does God bestow sanctity, or is man deputized to confer it? This is a fundamental question. Its primary application is halakhic, but it is also a critical question regarding ones' conception of how man serves God...

When we speak of holiness originating with the Almighty, we mean that the very presence of sanctity, its existence in a particular object that has a certain inherent nature, all stems from God.

Some people find the very notion that sanctity could be created by man to be inconceivable. After all, they claim, how can man create sanctity? Man is a material being. Who authorized him? Where does he derive such capabilities? What mystical power could enable man to create sanctity?

Of course, if a person wishes to relate to a particular object *as if* it has sanctity, that would be one thing. But to say that the object *truly* has sanctity – how can this be?...

When I was a student at Yeshiva University, I took a course on cultic worship in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt. The professor said... that religion emanates from the upper worlds. It stems from the bond with God. This is the exclusive domain of the Almighty.

By contrast, the Rav maintained the opposite perspective. When I was still a young student, I attended a series of summer lectures, *shiurim*, on, among other things, the sanctity and sanctification of places in halakha.

The Rav said that holiness is created by man. God created a neutral world with raw materials that can be endowed with holiness. The Rav said that it is true that there are things that possess intrinsic holiness, but, essentially, sanctity is created by man. Man receives neutral raw materials and fashions them with the sanctity of his personality, and that is the core from which sanctity develops.

Sometime later I saw that Rav Meir Simha of Dvinsk advances a similar approach in his *Meshekh Hokhmah* (on Exodus 19:13). "Divine acts do not instill sanctity; only sanctification by man effects holiness."...

There are several examples of phenomena whose sanctity is natural. One of them, in the realm of sanctified times, is the Sabbath. The Talmud in Tractate Pesachim (117b) states that on the Sabbath we say in our prayers and in the Kiddush, "Who sanctifies the Sabbath" whereas on festivals we say "Who sanctifies Israel and the seasons," and the Talmud explains that this is because the Sabbath is established and permanent, whereas the festivals are sanctified by the Jewish people.

Man does not create the Sabbath. However, man is involved in the establishment of the festivals through the High Court's sanctification of the new moon. The sanctification of the new moon does not establish on which day the Sabbath will fall, but it does establish the day on which the festivals will occur...

Despite that which is said regarding the Sabbath, it is clear to me that there is a human role here as well. Man has a central role, for he determines when the holidays will fall, and what degree of sanctity a particular animal might come to possess. There is, of course, a level of natural sanctity. The question is what man contributes when he comes to sanctify the Sabbath.

When we "sanctify the Sabbath with words" as we have been commanded to do in "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8) what sanctification are we effecting? Do we mean that the Almighty gave the Sabbath its holiness and we are merely agreeing? Or perhaps we can say, as it would appear grammatically, "to keep it holy (*le'kadsho*)" is to create something new!...

It is clear that the Sabbath was holy before man sanctified it, but a person can *add* an element of sanctity. There is no comparison between the natural sanctity of the Sabbath and the Sabbath sanctified by man, even though he has only made this secondary contribution...

Making Kiddush confers sanctity to the day, while Havdala breaks this bond. One cannot create non-holiness. There is no such thing. The non-holy is neutral the recitation of Havdala simply brings the sanctity of the Sabbath to a close...

[Proofs from Kiddush Hachodesh, Hatpasa Bivchor, and Kinyan Chatzer Lihekdesh.]

The linchpin is the understanding that all sanctity derives from the Almighty. There is no question that all sanctity stems from the bond to Him. The verse states: "You shall be holy *for* I, the Lord your God, am holy." (Leviticus 19:2) What is the meaning of this word – "for [*ki*]?"

There are those who wish to understand “for” as indicating a comparison – you shall be holy just as I am holy. But I do not see it that way. I interpret it as indicating a link, a bond, between our holiness and His. There is ultimate sanctity, which stems from the Almighty. Man, by connecting to God, absorbs some of this holiness, and becomes sanctified such that he is then capable of transmitting holiness into the world.

4. משך חכמה שמות פרק לב פסוק יט

ויהי כאשר קרב אל המחנה וירא את העגל ומחולות ויחר אף משה וישלך מידו את הלוחות וישבר אותם תחת ההר. הענין, כי התורה והאמונה המה עיקרי האומה הישראלית, וכל הקדושות, ארץ ישראל וירושלים וכו' המה פרטי וסניפי התורה ונתקדשו בקדושת התורה. ולכן אין חילוק לכל עניני התורה בין במקום בין בזמן, והיא שוה בארץ ישראל ובחול [לבד מצוות התלויות בארץ]. וכן הוא שוה בין לאדם הגבוה שבגבוהים - משה איש הא - לקים - להשפל שבשפלים... ועל זה צוה משה ככרוכיא: האם תדמו כי אני ענין ואיזו קדושה בלתי מצות ה', עד כי בהעדר כבודי עשייתם לכם עגל! חלילה, גם אני איש כמוכם, והתורה אינה תלויה בי... ואל תדמו כי המקדש והמשכן המה ענינים קדושים מעצמם, חלילה! השם יתברך שורה בתוך בניו, ואם "המה כאדם עברו ברית" (הושע ו, ז), הוסר מהם כל קדושה, והמה ככלי חול' באו פריצים ויחללוה'. וטיטוס נכנס לקודש הקדשים וזונה עמו ולא ניזוק (גיטין נו, ב), כי הוסר קדושתו...

"ויחר אף משה וישלך מידיו את הלוחות", רצונו לומר כי אין שום קדושה וענין אלקי כלל בלעדי מציאות הבורא יתברך שמו. ואם הביא הלוחות, היו כמחליפים עגל בלוח ולא סרו מטעותם. אולם כאשר שבר הלוחות, ראו איך המה לא הגיעו אל מטרת האמונה ב"ה ותורתו הטהורה.

5. Jerusalem's Two Types of Sanctity, and their Implications, VBM, accessible at <http://etzion.org.il/en/jeruselems-two-types-sanctity-and-their-implications>

The Gemara in several places deals with the question whether the "first sanctification" was only temporary or meant to be forever. This question arises both with respect to the sanctity of the land of Israel and with respect to the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple. The land was sanctified for the first time in the days of Yehoshua, whereas Jerusalem and the Temple were sanctified in the days of David and Shelomo. Regarding both sanctities, the Gemara raises the question as to whether they were meant to be valid forever, or whether they lapsed with the destruction of the Temple and exile to Babylonia in the days of Nevuchadnetzar. The gist of the issue is whether these sanctities depend upon specific external circumstances, e.g., the people of Israel's presence in the land, or whether they are not dependent upon anything else, so that once the original sanctification took effect, it remains valid forever. The Gemara raises a similar question regarding the "second sanctification" in the days of the Ezra.

The Rambam distinguishes between the two sanctities. Regarding the sanctity of the land of Israel, he rules that the first sanctification has lapsed, and that only the sanctification brought about by Ezra is valid forever. Regarding the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple, however, he rules that the original sanctification is valid forever. This means that, fundamentally speaking, one is permitted today to eat of the holiest sacrifices (*kodshei kadashim*) on the site where the Temple had stood, and to eat second-tithe (*ma'aser sheni*) within the confines of Jerusalem. On the other hand, one who treads upon the Temple site in a state of ritual impurity is liable for the punishment of excision. The Rambam (*Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira* 6:16) explains the difference between the two sanctities as follows. The sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple depends upon the *Shekhina*, God's Presence, and the *Shekhina* never departed, whereas the sanctity of the land of Israel depends upon the conquest of the land, and therefore it lapsed when the land was removed from Israel's possession.

Much can be said about the Rambam's view, but I would like to focus on the position of the Ra'avad, who disagrees with the Rambam:

This [ruling derives from] his own reasoning, and I know not where it comes from... According to the view that the first sanctification was not meant to be forever, there is no distinction between the Temple and Jerusalem, and the rest of the land of Israel. Moreover, I say that even according to Rabbi Yose, who said that the second sanctification was meant to be forever – he only said this regarding the rest of the land of Israel, but regarding Jerusalem and the Temple he did not say it.

For Ezra knew that the Temple and Jerusalem would change in the future and be sanctified by another eternal sanctification with the glory of God forever. Thus it was revealed to me, God's mystery to those who fear Him. Therefore, one who enters there [the Temple site] today is not liable for excision. (Ra'avad, *Hilkhot Beit ha-Bechira* 6:14)

At the beginning of his critical note, the Ra'avad says that the Rambam's distinction between the sanctity of the land of Israel and the sanctity of the Temple must not be accepted: if the first sanctification of the land lapsed, then the same should apply to the first sanctification of the Temple. There are two ways to understand this argument:

- 1) The sanctity of the land of Israel is inferior to the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple, and, therefore, if the inferior sanctity of the land did not survive the destruction and the exile, all the more so must the more sublime sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple have lapsed.
- 2) The sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple depends upon the sanctity of the land of Israel, such that it would be impossible for the sanctity of the land to have lapsed, while the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple still continued. According to the Rambam, this was the situation during the period between the destruction of the first Temple and the construction of the second Temple, whereas according to the Ra'avad, such a situation is impossible.

There are two aspects to the sanctity of Jerusalem. On the one hand, this sanctity is connected to the uniqueness of Jerusalem in relation to the other cities of Israel: only in Jerusalem can the Temple be constructed, and only there can sacrifices of lesser holiness (*kodashim kalim*) and second-tithe be eaten. On the other hand, it is possible that Jerusalem was sanctified only because it is part of the land of Israel. Jerusalem is set apart from the rest of the land, but it draws its sanctity from it. It is regarded as the "courtyard of God," but it is not detached from its surroundings. Jerusalem's unique sanctity is like a second story resting on the basic sanctity of the land of Israel in the midst of which it is situated.

The Ra'avad's argument may be understood as follows: Had the sanctity of the land lapsed with the exile, the sanctity of Jerusalem could not possibly have remained intact. When the land of Israel turns into a land like all other lands, Jerusalem loses its unique standing as well.

The Rambam, as stated above, disagrees with the Ra'avad, maintaining that the sanctity of Jerusalem remained in force even after the sanctity of the land of Israel lapsed. It is possible that he maintains that there is no connection between the two sanctities, and that the sanctity of Jerusalem does not at all depend upon the status of the land of Israel.

R. Chayyim Soloveitchik and his son R. Mosheh, however, understood the Rambam differently. According to them, there are two aspects to the sanctity of the land of Israel. One aspect is the sanctity of the soil, which is of vital importance regarding obligation in the *mitzvot* that are dependent upon the land of Israel. A second aspect is the sanctity of the place, the land of Israel being the place where the *Shekhina* rests. The first aspect lapsed along with the exile, but its continued existence is not necessary for the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple to remain in effect. The second aspect, however, continued all the time, for the *Shekhina* never departed. The sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple is based on this second aspect of the land of Israel, and since this aspect never lapsed, the sanctity of Jerusalem always remained intact.

According to this, the Rambam agrees that the sanctity of Jerusalem is connected to the sanctity of the land and is dependent upon the entire land being defined as the place in which the *Shekhina* rests.

The end of the Ra'avad's critical note sounds a different note. The Ra'avad argues that there is room to distinguish between the two sanctities in the opposite manner: the sanctity of the land of Israel exists today,

whereas the sanctity of Jerusalem and the Temple has lapsed, so that one who enters the site of the Temple is not liable for excision. The Ra'avad explains that Jerusalem and the Temple will be sanctified once again in the future when the glory of God will reveal itself in them, and therefore Ezra took care to sanctify them only with temporary sanctity. According to the Ra'avad, thus it was revealed to him, "God's mystery to those who fear Him."

The earthly Jerusalem depends, then, upon the heavenly Jerusalem, and sanctity cannot rest there until the glory of God reveals itself in the world. During the period that the Temple stood, facts were created on the ground and the *Shekhina* rested on the Temple. After the Temple was destroyed, however, the sanctity could no longer remain in Jerusalem or in the Temple, and will not return there until the arrival of the final redemption.

The words of the Ra'avad reflect, therefore, a certain duality regarding Jerusalem. On the one hand, he sees it as an integral part of the land of Israel, and he maintains that it draws its sanctity from the entire land. On the other hand, he emphasizes the difference between them: Even when the land of Israel is sanctified, the sanctity of Jerusalem remains but a dream and a vision.

Today, this duality presses upon our consciousness more than ever before. In this period, when parts of the land of Israel are being ceded to others, many people repeatedly emphasize that Jerusalem is not part of the discussion, and that there will be no concessions in its regard. Nevertheless, some circles are prepared to bring Jerusalem into the debate.

This position is a cause for worry on several counts. First of all, the fear exists that the status of Jerusalem will continue to be eroded, and that negotiations will be conducted in its regard. Beyond this, however, we are dealing here with a symptom of a more serious problem: the growing domination of pragmatism and living for today, and the preference given to considerations of convenience over important values.

Practically speaking, the secular outlook does not recognize the phenomenon of sanctity. Thus, it follows that all days are equal, as are all objects, and all places, so that Jerusalem has no greater importance than any other place.

As long as this erosion of Jerusalem's status continues, so too will it turn from a symptom of a phenomenon into a factor that itself intensifies the phenomenon, thus strengthening the scorn shown to the status of Jerusalem and to holy values in general.

Jerusalem's recapture during the Six-Day War brought outbursts of joy and elation among all sectors of the population. Jerusalem lit a spark even in the hearts of non-religious people, who didn't know exactly how to explain why Jerusalem was so dear to them. Today, the status of Jerusalem continues to be diminished, and it is hard to know where the process will stop.

What has been said here relates to us as well. We must strive to strengthen the status of Jerusalem in both its aspects. Moreover, we must strengthen our sensitivity and awareness regarding everything that relates to sanctity in general. This awareness finds expression in various situations: when a person stands next to a Torah scroll on *Shabbator Yom Tov*, or when he stands at the gates of Jerusalem. A decline in the status of Jerusalem impacts upon our consciousness of sanctity in general.

Jerusalem draws upon the sanctity of the land of Israel, but is also regarded as having sublime sanctity of its own. It relates both to realization and to vision; it is connected both to the present and to the future. We must anchor these different aspects deep within us and understand the relationship between them – only then will we fully appreciate the meaning and value of Jerusalem.

(This sicha was delivered on Yom Yerushalayim 5754 [1994].)