

Sanctification

Hillel Goldberg

I

Sanctification.

It's objective.

Laid out.

With boundaries.

Defined spaces.

Places you enter.

Or don't.

If you define the spaces and places your own way,
you do not enter. Do not get to the sanctification.

On its face, sanctification is restrictive.

Limiting.

Dismissive of human struggle, human initiative, human
achievement.

On its face, sanctification is narrow.

Insular.

Forbidding.

Actually, the opposite is true.

Within the boundary is the expansiveness.

And the individuality.

Within the boundary is the liberation.

The closeness to God.

God?

Yes, the process and the purpose of sanctification is
to come close to God.

To stretch beyond the human boundaries.
 To see, to sense, to reach beyond the limitations of
 cells and organ systems, of species and ratiocination.
 God is limitless. But the way to God—the
 sanctification—is delimited.
 Bound.
 Given.
 Revealed.
 God is infinite, but God's presence "fits" into the
 defined, limited, and quite small dimensions of Exodus'
 tabernacle.
 A paradox?
 Actually, the ultimate paradox.
 The limitless God becomes available in the limited
 space.
 And the limited time.
 In place, exactly defined.
 In time, exactly defined.
 In these defined, objective spaces and times:
 sanctification.
 Step in, if you want it.
 Move from where you are to the defined space, to
 the boundaries of the land of Israel; or to the defined times,
 such as the Sabbath day—and there you find sanctification.
 There you find God.
 There, you struggle.

II

Sanctification is a given, as a *potential*.
 Sanctification is available, but it needs to be grasped,
 appropriated.
 Sanctification is a presence—if, within the boundaries,
 you seek it.
 If you inquire.

And study.

With your mind, your soul, and your character.

God, up to a point, may be understood.

And God's will, in its revelation, may be understood.

Then the mind, in its understanding, must impinge on
the heart.

The soul.

Must shape the soul.

Build it.

Open it.

Expand it.

Then both the mind and the soul must impinge on
character.

On acts.

Deeds.

To be sanctified, you enter the defined space and time—then
you begin.

Struggle within the boundaries yields the highest
human stature.

Struggle outside the boundaries may take the earnest,
searching human being to a certain height, at a certain angle.

But the funnel, the direct link to God, is through God's
objective, revealed channels.

Divine instructions.

Divine commandments.

Divine vessels, divine funnel, divine defined spaces
and times.

Divine will.

Divine gifts.

III

For example: God's commandment to observe the Sabbath day.

The Sabbath has a beginning.

And an end.

A very specific, closely defined beginning.
 And end.
 It is not "Saturday."
 Its beginning is not when one feels the time ripe.
 And it itself is not simply a "special time."
 A "time for prayer."
 Or "rest."
 Or "reflection."
 Or "spirituality."
 Rather, it is a frame.
 A structure of acts to do, and not to do.
 Objective, these thirty-nine acts, if refrained from,
 constitute the boundaries. By refraining from these thirty-
 nine acts, there is the Sabbath day.
 Refraining from them, one steps into something preexistent.
 One steps inside.
 One crosses the boundary.
 Then, from within that spiritual space, is the potential
 for struggle, for upward movement.
 For expansiveness.
 For building the mind, the soul, the character.
 For reaching, touching, God, the Creator of the frame.
 The Revealer of the Sabbath.
 Of what it is, and how it is: the observance of these thirty-nine
 acts.
 They frame the frame.
 God's gift.
 Perhaps, after creation itself, God's greatest gift.
 The most spiritually potent channel for accessing God.
 But, once within the frame, once observant of the
 thirty-nine acts, the struggle begins.
 The opportunity.
 To open the soul to God.
 To use the mind to access God's will.
 The opportunity—for sanctification.
 The struggle—also, the tranquility.

Seeking God—and having God.

Human initiative—and human submission to the defined space,
to the Sabbath day.

The ultimate paradox: one may reach the highest
heights when, by refraining from the thirty-nine acts, one
does nothing.

Nothing physical.

Through the objective command.

The Sabbath day.

IV

The human being eats.

Anything?

Or is eating, too, an opportunity?

A God-given frame?

If this I eat, and this I don't: does it make any spiritual
difference?

Here, too, is the opportunity for sanctification.

In Leviticus' dietary (kosher) frame.

This I may eat; this I may not.

The human being is intimate.

Any way? With any person?

Or, are intimacy and procreation also an opportunity?

A God-given frame?

Here, too, is an opportunity for sanctification.

In Leviticus' *mikveh* frame.

*This person I may be intimate with; these others, not. At this time, yes;
at other times, no.*

The human being wears clothing, the human being
earns money, the human being speaks: here, too, are
opportunities for sanctification.

This I may wear; this I may not.

This money I may take; this, not.

This I may say; this I may not.

A cascade of frames.
 A concentric circle of overlapping and expanding—
 objective—acts.
 Places to enter.
 More gifts.
 Across the expanse of life.

V

Only within the frames?
 Sanctification is nowhere else?
 What about on the mountaintop or at the seashore?
 What about in the garden or under the rushing rain?
 What about in the snow or at the sunset?
 These are not frames?
 Not opportunities for sanctification?
 They are not.
 They are preparations for sanctification.
 They can sensitize.
 Can enrich the human spirit.
 Can inspire.
 Amaze.
 Take one to the realization, or the consciousness, of God, of
 God's presence.
 Yet, they are fluid.
 They come.
 And go.
 They need the frame to last.
 Yes, they can build and nurture the human being, who
 is then able to want a lasting sanctification.
 Yes, they can confirm the closeness to God disclosed by
 sanctification.
 Yes, they can enhance the beauty, the artistic sense,
 encouraged by sanctification.
 They can take us to the revelation.

Then, within the objective, revealed frame, the given,
the defined space and time, sanctification awaits.

VI

Back up.

To the mind.

To its capacity.

To the revealed will.

To the Torah.

To its study.

The Torah is not just words, not just instructions,
not just the divine disclosure of the frames for sanctification.

Not just an instrument.

A guidebook.

Not just narratives of the paragons and paradigms of
sanctification.

Not just a spiritual “need to know.”

Not even, primarily, a window on the history of
sanctification, whether in instances of its success or instances
of its failure.

Study of the Torah is not just the acquisition of
knowledge.

Not just a great challenge to the mind.

Or a great reward for, or a tool of, the sharpening of
the mind.

The study of Torah is sanctification itself.

To engage with the divine will is to engage with the
Divine.

To study Torah is the specific frame, itself commanded
by the Torah, with the greatest potential for sanctification.

To study Torah is the opportunity to come close to
God.

In Torah study, not only does the will of God speak:
God’s very Self speaks.

The wrong analogy: what the person of Jesus is to

Christianity, the Messiah is to Judaism.
 The right analogy: what the “Incarnation” is to
 Christianity, the Torah is to Judaism.
 Actually, God never takes the form of a human being;
 God is disclosed via the Torah. There is no other “Incarnation.”
 When the words of Torah are studied, not only is the
 divine will accessed, but the Divine Self is accessed. For
 Christians, God lived through Jesus. For Jews today, God
 lives through the Torah.

VII

Back up. Again.

To speech.

To the commandments of speech.

Specifically, to what the divine will says people may
 not say.

We many not say denigrating words.

Or incendiary words.

Or false words.

Within this threefold frame of what is not to be said—
 insults, provocations, falsehoods—is sanctification.

Which, simultaneously, is character building.

Through the frame of prohibited speech, one comes
 close to God.

And to people.

The struggle for closeness to God and the struggle for
 harmony among people are coextensive.

Sanctification is not only a divine gesture.

It is a human gesture.

The human being is created “the human face Divine,” as Rabbi
 Aaron Lichtenstein translated *b’tzelem*
elohim (Genesis 1:27).

The objective definition of sanctification, and the
 opportunities for it, include the material.

Sanctification, yes; stretches beyond human boundaries.
 Within human boundaries.
 Sanctification reaches beyond body and mind.
 Within body and mind.
 Sanctification is vertical.
 Also, horizontal—within human society.
 Sanctification aspires upwards.
 And sideways.

VIII

Back up, still again.
 “Sanctification.”
 It is general.
You shall be sanctified (Leviticus 19:2).
 This pertains to every move, every gesture, within
 every frame, every *mitzvah*.
 “Sanctification” is also specific.
 A single *mitzvah*.
 A single frame: that of marriage, called “sanctification”
 (*kiddushin*).
 In its specificity, sanctification is the most restrictive;
 and, on that account, the most liberating frame in the Torah.
 If I wish to marry a non-Jewish person and call it
 “sanctification” (*kiddushin*), I cannot.
 It is akin to division by zero.
 Division by zero is indefinable in our number system.
Kiddushin, applied to the marriage of a Jew and a
 non-Jew, is indefinable in the Torah.
 It is not there.
 If I am a *kohen*, a priest, a descendant of Aaron the high priest,
 the brother of Moses, and I wish to marry a divorcee, I cannot.
 It is not there.
 “*Kohen* marries divorcee”: it is indefinable under the
 Torah.

It is not *kiddushin*.

If I am a male and wish to marry a male.

If I am a female and wish to marry a female.

It is not there.

Not *kiddushin*.

It is indefinable under the Torah.

If I wish to divorce my spouse, then marry others,

“taking a sample of spouses,” then come back to remarry my original spouse.

Not there.

Not *kiddushin*.

Indefinable under the Torah.

“Sanctification,” *kiddushin*—the most searing of objectivities, the most restrictive of boundaries, the most elevating of opportunities, disclosed by God via the Torah.

Kiddushin: God’s holiest vessel.

IX

Sanctification: What is its opposite?

The thinnest line, as wide as the Grand Canyon,
separates sanctification from its opposite.

So thin, this line:

If I take water, and guide it to ground, using no vessel,
nor certain other handmade or natural materials, voilà! I
have a pool of water, a *mikveh*, that purifies. Immersion in it
elevates a person from one spiritual status to another.

If I take the very same water—exchanging not so
much as a single molecule—yet guide it to ground via a
vessel, the water is flat. Lifeless. Empty of spiritual vitality.
It elevates nothing.

Same water: This time, within the objective frame, laid
down in the Torah.

This time, not.

This time, sanctification.

This time, not.

If I slaughter an animal with a knife that has the slightest nick, I may not eat of the animal.

If I slaughter it with a perfect, flawless blade, I may eat thereof.

Same animal.

Same moment of death.

Virtually, the same instrument of slaughter.

This, I may eat.

This, I may not.

If I lend money and take no interest, I may use this money.

If I lend on 0.1% interest, I may not.

Virtually, the same amount.

This, I may take.

This, I may not.

The thinnest line marks the largest chasm: between that which elevates, and that which does not; between that which I may do, and that which I may not.

Sanctification and sin: So similar. So different.

X

Is sanctification only for those who live and study the Torah?

Are non-Jews excluded?

In an obvious sense, yes.

In other senses, no.

Yes, those who do not live and study the Torah do not access its frames.

God's act of choosing is via the divine revealed frames.

Via God's gift of the potential for sanctification.

Yet.

No one is excluded. Anyone may adopt the Torah.

It is not a closed system.

Not the property of a race.
 Or an ethnicity.
 Or a nationality.
 Any human being may convert to the life of Torah.
 There is no guard at the Gate of the Torah.
 Still more: even without conversion to Judaism, seven
 of the frames of the Torah are universal.
 Not just for adherents of the Torah.
 The “seven commandments of the sons of Noah”—of
 humanity—are incumbent upon and accessible to all people.
 The commandments of justice.
 Of morality.
 Of faith.
 Of kindness to animals.
 To cite four of the seven universal frames of the Torah.
 They unite all of humanity.
 They *define* humanity.
 They constitute God’s ways of choosing every human
 being.
 They constitute God’s gifts to humanity.
 God’s objective frames.
 God’s sanctification.
 For everyone.

XI

Sanctification is a spiritual and experiential certainty.
 And a philosophical conundrum.
 Sanctification is Godlike, and humanlike.
 Beyond.
 And here.
 Above.
 And below.
 Out of this world.
 Through this world.

Prayer.

And society.

Sabbath.

And weekday.

Torah study.

And marriage.

Transcending cells and organ systems—and infusing them.

Sanctification is hidden, in prayer. In speech for God.

Sanctification is visible. In speech for people.

Sanctification is a conundrum, the most hidden, and the most visible.

The late Rabbi Aryeh Levine observed that when a

new baby is born, the friends and relatives rejoice, while the baby cries. But when a person dies, the friends and relatives cry, while the soul rejoices, exulting in eternal closeness to God.

Sanctification is both: the objective, revealed, divine

frames that elevate the human being in this world.

And guide him or her to the next world.

Both.

You shall be *sanctified*.