

# Parshat Emor:

## Kiddush Hashem.

### Sanctifying God's Name

"You shall faithfully observe my commandments and perform them: I am the Lord. And you shall not profane my Holy name; that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel - I am the Lord who sanctifies you, I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord." (22:31-32)

It is a somewhat inconspicuous passage in our *parsha*, a directive that blends into its surroundings. One would simply read over it without a second glance. But this statement is not one to overlook, for this command contains latent energy of the most astounding proportions. These verses are the source text for the *mitzva* of *Kiddush Hashem*. The concept of *Kiddush Hashem* - Sanctification of the Divine Name - and its mirror image, *Chillul Hashem* - the desecration or profaning of God's name - is the basis for the entire theology of martyrdom in Judaism, the source for the *Kaddish* and *Kedusha* prayers, and the impetus behind a norm that expects all who represent God in some way to exhibit exemplary conduct in all spheres of life.

### Chavruta Study:

1. See Vayikra 22:31-2. Look at the pesukim, the contextual background and the standard meparshim (Rashi, Ibn Ezra, Ramban, Seforno.)

Ask yourselves:

- Whether the halachik concept of Kiddush Hashem as we know it is reached by "reading out" from the pesukim, or "reading in" concepts into the pesukim?

-How does the concept of Kiddush Hashem fit into the context here?

2. The details of the laws of Kiddush Hashem are quite fascinating. Two very fascinating expositions on this topic can be found in:

- The Sefer Hachinuch
- Rambam, Mishne Torah, Hil. Yesodei Hatorah Ch.5 (all of it!)

Ask yourselves:

i. Is Kiddush Hashem a "linear" concept. i.e. Does it apply to all people in the same way?

ii. Is Kiddush Hashem about the act itself, or is it about the public perception of that act? (Why is it more severe in the

presence of ten people?)

3. An interesting presentation by Rabbi Norman Lamm can be found in the Encyclopedia Judaica under the entry "Kiddush Hashem". I have used his three-fold structure in my shiur here. [Rabbi Lamm also refers to a piece by Agnon. If you have time, and the Hebrew ability, look it up. It is quite wonderful.]

### Shiur:

To whom are these verses directed? Who is commanded to sanctify God's name and not profane it? The Ibn Ezra states that this is a law for the Kohanim in particular. How does he reach this conclusion?

FOR THE PRIESTS

He bases his approach on contextual grounds. He notes that the paragraph which this command concludes concerns the sacrificial rite of the Temple and is addressed to the kohanim in particular. Indeed, this command comes at the tail-end of four paragraphs each concerned with the regulations of priestly life. Additionally he proves his point from the verse which states, "...that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel". If it had been talking to the entire nation it would have said, "That I may be sanctified amongst you." Clearly the law of sanctification stated here is a law for the elite priestly caste.

Following this train of thought, we will note that this statement mirrors an explicit directive to the kohanim at the start of our parsha:

Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron and tell them ... **They shall be holy** to their God and **they shall not profane** the name of their God; for they offer the Lord's offerings... **they must be holy.**" (21:1,6)

As is common in the style of the Torah, certain ideas or collections of laws come with chiasmic "headers" and "footers" denoting the main themes of that section. In other words, the Torah gives a title to a parsha by introducing it with a particular heading in the opening line. The Torah denotes that it has finished with a topic by echoing the opening line in the final clause of the topic at hand. Here we can identify a similar beginning and ending to a distinct unit of kohanim based laws. By telling us that this command is a particularly priestly command, the Ibn Ezra is utilising a standard structural technique which is found throughout the Torah.

Why are the priests singled out for additional responsibility in the area of profanity or sanctification of God's name? The priests are the messengers of God and his earthly representatives. In this capacity, managing the Temple, they have the responsibility of presenting God to

the people. If they act with integrity, ethical perfection and spiritual purity, then they sanctify God's name. However, any blemish in their behaviour will lessen the relationship of the nation to God, and "profane" the name of God.

#### A NATION OF PRIESTS

But the Ibn Ezra's is not the mainstream opinion. Most commentators view our verse as a lesson for the nation at large. For most commentators and for the halakhic sources this is the source of the mitzva of Kiddush Hashem incumbent on every Jew. In this interpretation, everything that we said above is true for the entire Jewish people in their role as "a nation of priests." (Ex. 20:6) In the words of Maimonides:

**"The whole House Of Israel** is commanded to sanctify His great name, as it states (Lev. 22:32): "And I shall be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel", and they are forbidden to profane it, as it states: "You shall not profane My holy name" (Mishne Torah. Fundamental Laws -Yesodei HaTorah 5:1)

But can human beings really profane the holiness of God or magnify His holiness? Can flesh and blood tarnish the Almighty? And another question. What is the emphasis on God's name? Can a name be desecrated or sanctified?

#### THE NOTION OF GOD'S NAME

Nechama Leibowitz gives us a useful working definition of the concept of sanctification of God's name. She calls it, "the propagation of human acknowledgement and recognition of Him and His holiness." [1] In other words, Kiddush Hashem is talking about the degree to which God is recognised as powerful and holy in the world. An increase in this state of reverence for God is described as "sanctification" of His name. A lessening of God's esteem in the eyes of mankind is an act of profanity of God's name - the recognition of His supremacy and holiness.

This concept finds its roots deep in the Bible. Enosh is the first individual who relates to the name of God. The Torah reports the moment at which:

"He began to profane the NAME of God." (Gen 4:26) [2]

What did he do to profane God's name? Maimonides describes Enosh's act in detail. He tells us that Enosh initiated the first act of pagan worship. Why is this described as a desecration of God's name? - Because the introduction of "other gods" into the civilised world obscures the exclusive pre-eminence of God. It "profanes" His name because God's reputation is diminished in some manner.

Conversely, we have Abraham. He set out on a journey

following God. He wandered from place to place. In many of the places to which he travelled, he arrived, built an altar to God and "called out in the name of God"(Genesis 12:8). The Midrash gives shape to this proclamation:

"He called out in the NAME of God: This comes to teach that Abraham caused God's name to be proclaimed on the lips of every human being...he began to convert people (to Monotheism) and to bring the under the shelter of God's presence." (Midrash Rabba 39:16)

And Abraham's children continue the unique privilege and daunting responsibility of bearing the name of God in the world.

"You are My witnesses, saith the Lord.... that I am He; before Me there was no God, neither shall any exist after me (Isaiah 43:10)' - explained R. Shimon Bar Yochai 'If you are My witnesses then I am He, the first one; neither shall any be after Me. But if you are not my witnesses, I am not, as it were, God.'" (Midrash Pesikta DeRav Kahana)

So, God's "name" in the world is tied to the success of Israel's testimony to Him. But let us think together. In what way might we publicise and endear God's name to the wider society? How do we glorify and magnify his reputation on earth? Chazal come up with three primary vehicles of Kiddush Hashem.

#### 1. ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR

"And you shall love the Lord your God" (from the shema - Deut 6:5) - the name of God should become beloved through your acts. When a person studies the Bible and Jewish Law and ministers to scholars, speaking softly with people, honest and honourable in his business dealings, what do people say of him? This person who studied Torah - fortunate is his father who taught him, woe to people who have not studied Torah. Look at him - that Torah scholar - how pleasant, refined and honest he acts! Regarding this person the Bible states: 'You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.(Isaiah 49:3)

But if a person studied Torah .... and is not soft spoken honest and honourable... what do people say about him? Woe to his father who taught him Torah! Fortunate are those have not studied Torah ... Look at him, that Torah student, how unpleasant are his actions, how corrupt are his ways! This is what the Bible refers to when it states '...they profaned my holy name..'(Ezekiel 36:20" (Talmud Yoma 86a)

When an individual is identified with God, he is an advertisement for God Himself! Every action, no matter how mundane, how drab or 'everyday' it might be, reflects on God - because they are perceived as being connected. In this Talmudic passage, we talk about the potential influence of a young Torah scholar. The affect that his personal conduct will have on those around him will not simply reflect upon him as an individual but will influence their attitude to God and Torah as well. Furthermore, let us stress that the young Torah scholar is not expected to prove himself in the sphere of Torah study. He is to make his mark on the public mindset not by his impressive knowledge but rather by his exemplary conduct. For the man in the street, for the general public, he is measured on the yardstick of a gentle and upstanding personality: How does he talk to people? How honest and straightforward are his financial affairs? It is our modest actions which achieve more by personal example than by hours of talking about God and Torah. Actions most definitely speak louder than words.

Rabbi David Zvi Hoffman relates this law to the theme of the Book of Leviticus. The latter half of the book continually stresses the command to "keep my laws" (18:4,36; 19:37; 20:8,22). The picture that Leviticus is building is the establishment of a moral, holy society in the promised Land. He says:

"This command relates back to the command to "keep my laws..." Negligence and indifference in God's commandments is a desecration of God, for the commandments bear the weight of the name of God. This desecration is particularly acute if the sin is performed in public view. And therefore, in addition to the directive "do not profane.." is added the command "I will be sanctified". In the midst of the people of Israel God wishes to be recognised as holy, elevated, and supreme; that all are dependent on him and bound to his service."

## 2. MARTYRDOM

But probably the most dramatic expression of the law of "Kiddush Hashem" - sanctification of God's name - has been in the readiness of Jews throughout the ages to die a martyr's death.

"This precept is based on the idea that man was created for the sole purpose of serving his creator. Whoever is unprepared to lay down his life for his master is not a good servant. It is a fact that men lay down their lives for their masters, how much more so in obedience to the command of the king of kings, the Holy one blessed be he!" (Sefer Hachinuch #296)

The Talmud (Sanhedrin 74a) records that Kiddush Hashem is mandated in the case of three particular commandments, where a Jew is expected to suffer death rather than violate

them. These are the laws of; murder, idolatry and sexual violations (incest, adultery etc.). In other situations, the commandment is to be violated rather than suffer death. In a situation of religious oppression, however, when there is an explicit plot to force the Jew to abandon religious practice, a Jew would be required to give up his life for any amendment to the law, even the failure to fulfil a Jewish custom.

This law swims against the flow of much of the spirit of Judaism. Usually Judaism celebrates life and living: "In them, you will find life" (Lev 18:5). Indeed, as we have suggested, God's name IS to be sanctified in our very mode of living. Nonetheless, when it comes to the crunch, the willingness to die for God is the greatest statement of dedication to Him. How is this a sanctification of God's reputation? The answer is quite clear. Any cause which is ultimately valuable is going to be measured by its breaking point. The most extreme test-case is whether a person is willing to die for the truth of his cause.

The Midrash ties it to our verse in the following way:

"I am the Lord who sanctifies you, I who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God: I am the Lord' : On this condition did I bring you out of the land of Egypt that you submit yourselves to sanctify My name , that I be your God even by force; I the Lord am faithful to grant you your reward." (Sifra Emor #9)

Martyrdom has been a painful feature throughout Jewish history. From the stories of Channah and her seven sons in the Greek persecutions to the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva and his fellow scholars (recited in the Yom Kippur prayers), the crusades, inquisitions, pogroms and finally the Holocaust, we have a long history of "Kiddush Hashem". But in the eyes of popular Jewish folklore this was seen as the greatest test of faith. The Midrash - from the time of the Hadrianic persecutions of the 2nd Century - demonstrates how Jews came to view their persecution as a test of faith and dedication to God. The midrash relates in a most matter-of-fact manner:

"Those who dwell in the land of Israel risk their lives for sake of the commandments: 'Why are you being lead out to be beheaded?' "Because I read the Torah.' 'Why are you being taken to be crucified?' 'Because I ate unleavened bread.' 'Why are you getting one hundred lashes?' ' Because I performed the waving of the lulav.' These wounds caused me to be beloved of my father in heaven.'" (Mechilta BaChodesh #6)

## 3. PRAYER

The Talmud (Berachot 21a) relates Kiddush Hashem in a third way. It picks up the idea that God be sanctified "in the

midst of the Children of Israel". On this basis the Talmud states that certain prayers cannot be recited by the lone individual. Our verse is the basis for the prayer quorum - the Minyan, and here we see a new dimension to the sanctification of God's name; his name is elevated and praised publicly in our prayers.

What is the idea behind this? We might suggest that religion, if it is to have any power, must have a communal aspect. It is interesting that prayer which is essentially a man-God encounter - a private affair - be relegated to the public forum. But not only in Judaism; in many other religions, public prayer is the norm. Through prayer, we relate to God intimately, asking, praising, singing, crying. God is our address and in relating to God in this way, God's name is sanctified. But the communal dimension ensures that this relationship with God is brought into the public arena, and in that sense, certain prayers (Kaddish, Kedusha, borchu etc.) are impossible if there is not a quorum of ten present.

From another angle, prayer relates to the sanctification of God's name. Probably the most famous prayer in Judaism is the Kaddish prayer. The words of Kaddish relate to the issue of sanctification of God, for that is essentially what the prayer aims to say. "*Yitkadal veyitkadash shemei rabbah*" - "May the great name of God be magnified and sanctified in the world...". Here again we see the sanctification of God's name - through our prayers.

The Aruch Hashulchan states :

"The Kaddish is a great and awesome praise instituted by the men of the Great Assembly, living in the wake of the destruction of the first temple. After the desecration of God's holy name due to the destruction of the temple, the desolation of the Holy Land and the dispersion of Israel.... We pray that, "His name should be made great and be sanctified" (Yitgadal veyitkadash) as the prophet states (Ezekiel 38:23) " I will manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations".

Indeed , after tragedy strikes, we pray that God will sanctify His own name. Sometimes we lack the strength needed to sanctify God. Our prayer in Kaddish follows Ezekiel who tells us that God will work at sanctifying his own name. He will not call on man to perform that task. And so there are times when our sanctification of God is a prayer for God to enhance and glorify Himself in our world of pain and suffering.

## CONCLUSION

We have focused this week on a few simple verses which contain the command to sanctify God's name. This law has found for itself an extraordinarily central place in the Jewish

tradition. The three branches of this idea, three classic modes of fulfilment - ethical example, martyrdom and persecution, and prayer - can read as a virtual summary of Jewish throughout the ages!

Our prayer to God is that we continue to sanctify His name through life and not death. That our renewed existence as a nation in our land will enhance God's name in the world in a new way: by the ethical example that we as a nation may represent fulfilling our role of a "priest nation", living out our historic legacy as a "light unto the nations."

Shabbat shalom.

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[1] Studies in Vayikra pg. 213

[2] There is an alternative reading that Enosh "began to call in the name of God." See Ibn Ezra and Sephorno on Genesis 4:26. I chose not to get into this discussion to ensure the flow of the article. As to our discussion about the Name of God, there is little relevance as to whether our examples are about profanity or sanctification. In essence, they are simply two sides of the same coin.