



The Challenge of Kiddush Hashem

As Shavuot approaches and as a representative of the Torah in the world, I began pondering the *mitzvah* of *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying the Divine Name, and the corresponding prohibition against *Chilul Hashem*, desecrating the Divine Name.

We commonly use the term *Hashem*, meaning ‘the Name,’ to signify G-d. A person cannot desecrate G-d. But when it comes to G-d’s Name, His reputation in the world, or His effect upon human beings – that can be elevated or stained.

Desecration of G-d’s Name can range across a broad spectrum of contexts: from military defeat for the IDF and Israel’s exile amongst the nations, through a momentary lack of courtesy by a young girl in a skirt or a man in a *kippah*, to rabbis accused of harassment.

The possibilities for *Kiddush Hashem*, the sanctification of G-d’s name, are equally diverse, as the slogan at Ben-Gurion Airport – “Abroad We Are All Ambassadors” – reminds us; or as we see from time to time when Israeli rescue delegations rush to disaster-stricken areas.

Within the span between the cleanliness of a *Talmid Chacham*’s clothes, and the readiness to give our lives rather than commit a serious transgression, lies our own responsibility to be a living testimony to the fact His seal is truth and His Torah is a Torah of *chesed* (kindness), a Torah of life.

The sense that *Kiddush Hashem* and *Chilul Hashem* result from how the impact our actions have upon others may jar somewhat in terms of authenticity.

It is in vogue today to wish to live “our own truth” and not put on a façade. However, responsibility comes with the territory. To pretend that my actions carry no meaning beyond my small personal circle exhibits, at best, a great deal of naïveté.

“And you shall love the L-rd your G-d” – let the Divine Name become beloved through you. If one studies Scripture and Mishnah and ministers to Torah scholars, and is honest in business and speaks pleasantly to others, what do people say about him? “Happy is his father who taught him Torah; happy is his teacher who taught him Torah; woe unto those who have not studied Torah. For this man has studied the Torah, look how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds! Of him, Scripture says: “And He said unto me: You are My servant, Israel, in, whom I will be glorified.”

But one who studies Scripture and Mishnah and ministers to Torah scholars, but is dishonest in business and discourteous in his relations with people, what do people say about him? “Woe unto him who studied the Torah; woe unto his father who taught him Torah; woe unto his teacher who taught him Torah! For this man has studied the Torah, and look how corrupt are his deeds, how ugly his ways; of him, Scripture says: “In that men said of them: These are

the people of the Lord and are gone forth out of His land.” (Yoma 86a)

Am Yisrael represents G-d’s Name in the world to non-Jews. This view is expressed many times in Tanach.

On our own internal, Jewish stage, G-d’s Name is represented by anyone identified with Torah, to one degree or another.

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And once again, the State of Israel has placed us in the public eye, in an almost Biblical arena, but in a renewed light.

Now, after 2,000 years of exile, we Jews are faced with the ultimate test of *Kiddush Hashem*: can we remain strong, standing firm among the nations, adopting a non-apologetic stance to defending ourselves, while at the same time striving for a just and good society, one that sanctifies G-d’s name both internally and to the world? A society that makes us proud, and inspires us as Torah Jews?

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