

EMOR (LEVITICUS 21:1-24:23)

Is There a Middle of the Road?

2001 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Don't make a '*Chillul Hashem*,'" they would warn us. "Don't give people a bad impression about Jews. Make a '*Kiddush Hashem*!'"

What is a *Kiddush Hashem* and what is a *Chillul Hashem*? Both concepts are mentioned in this week's Torah Reading: *Do not desecrate My holy name. I must be sanctified among the Israelites.* (Leviticus, 22:32)

Maimonides lists this verse as the source of two different Mitzvahs: a prohibition against doing anything that will give G-d or His Torah a bad name, and a requirement to enhance the reputation of G-d and His Torah.

They used to tell us that Yeshiva students should always be well-behaved, lest we create a *Chillul Hashem* -- a desecration of G-d's name by allowing people the misimpression that people with Torah values don't know how to behave properly. Rather, we should be sure to make a *Kiddush Hashem* -- a sanctification of G-d's name by showing the world how honorably the Torah requires us to act.

Examples: You know how it makes your skin crawl when the front page of the newspaper shows an allegedly "religious" Jew being led away after being accused of some unspeakable crime? *Chillul Hashem*. Nothing makes the Torah look worse than allowing the world to think that it doesn't teach us values. Do you remember a few years ago when Malden Mills in Massachusetts burnt down? Aaron Feuerstein, the orthodox owner of the plant, kept his workers on the payroll for all the months that they sat idle during the rebuilding of his plant. *Kiddush Hashem*. The world had the opportunity to see that for a Torah Jew, the amount of money you make at the end of the day is not the bottom line.

It's interesting to note that the Torah doesn't seem to allow for any middle ground. "Do not desecrate My holy name. I must be sanctified among the Israelites."

How about acting in a way that creates neither good P.R. nor bad? What if we live our lives quietly and anonymously, without calling attention to ourselves in any way? Can't we just do what we have to do without desecrating G-d's name but not grabbing positive headlines for Him either?

There's no such thing.

Rav Eliezer Shach, may he live and be well, is the esteemed dean of the illustrious Ponevitzh Yeshiva in B'nei Brak, Israel. [NOTE: In the time since this article was written, Rav Shach of Blessed Memory, has left us. He was well over a hundred years old.] Rav Shach points out that G-d places great emphasis on His own honor. The Talmud says in Pirkei Avos, "*Whatever G-d created in His world, He created it exclusively for His honor.*"

Why, asks Rav Shach, is G-d so concerned about His image? He is, after all, the "*Adon Olam asher malach...*" – the Master of the World who ruled long before we got here. Does He really need honor from us? Why is He so caught up in His own glory?

The answer, says Rav Shach, is that G-d is telling us who WE are. G-d, who "*formed man out of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils a living soul* (Genesis, 2:8), has endowed us with His image and His nobility. We, who every moment of our lives bear the privilege of being G-d's creations, carry the enormous responsibility of living our lives in a manner that befits our royal lineage.

If we live a life that brings honor to G-d, we fulfill our Divine destiny and generate *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctification of G-d's name that is UPON US. If, however, we decide to wing it, to take it easy and live a non-descript life, not-so-good and not-so-bad, we've missed the point. We are royalty. We are the children of G-d. Any behavior that is less than regal creates *Chillul Hashem*, a desecration, a waste of our G-dly potential.

Have a great Shabbos.

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