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SANCTIFICATION OR DESECRATION

Dr. Yitzchok Levine
Posted Jul 08 2009

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Everyone seems to be obsessed with Jews. Although numerically we are an insignificant minority of the world's population, the media focus like lasers on everything we say and do.



In recent years secular media outlets have become preoccupied with the actions of Orthodox Jews in particular. And, of course, anything that makes Orthodox Jews look bad is given first priority. Whether we like it or not, we are under the microscope of both non-Jews and non-religious Jews.

This has far reaching implications concerning the image we portray to the world. We are being watched, and we must be on our best behavior at all times. If we're not, then what we do can lead to numerous incidents of *chillul Hashem* (desecration of God's name).

'A Jew Through and Through'

In his essay "Tammuz I," Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch points out that one of the five tragedies that took place on the Seventeenth of Tammuz was that "The tablets [*Luchos*] were broken when Moshe descended from the mountain." The *Luchos* were unique in that they "were written on both their sides, on the one side and on the other were they written" (Exodus 32:15).

The word from Sinai must not grip us only superficially and one-sidedly. It must penetrate us through and through, it must set its stamp indelibly on every part of our being, and whichever way we are turned the writing of God must everywhere be visible on us clearly and legibly. See the Divine tables of testimony! On them there was no above and below, no front and back. The writing pierced right through them, and yet they could be read on both sides. This must be a model for you. Be a Jew through and through. Whichever way you are turned, be a Jew. Do not engrave the Divine writing only on one side, one part, one aspect of your being, so that you will appear a Jew and a missionary of the Divine name and the Divine will only when regarded from one side and one aspect, but when you turn your back and enter into other relationships you will appear as anything but a Jew, a missionary for anything but the name and the will of God; or at any rate you will not be so completely a Jew, you will not be so clearly stamped as a missionary of God's will. Be a Jew through and through on all sides and in all aspects. [Collected Writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Vol. I]

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Clearly the Torah requires that all our actions be performed in a manner in accordance with *halacha*.

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Unfortunately, today we hear media reports about so-called *frum* Jews who, while being scrupulous in their observance of *mitzvos bein adam l'Makom* (between man and God), are accused - and at times convicted - of crimes that show total disregard for Torah principles in their dealings with their fellow man. It is as though they have split personalities and are two different people when it comes to

religious observance.

Glatt Kosher - Glatt Yoshor

These points are further elucidated in the writings of Rav Dr. Yosef Breuer. In his essay with the above title that originally appeared in Volume XI 1949/50 of the KAJ publication *Mitteilungen* and is reprinted in the book *Rav Breuer: His Life and Legacy*, he wrote:

"Kosher" is intimately related to "Yoshor." God's Torah not only demands the observance of Kashruth and the sanctification of our physical enjoyment; it also insists on the sanctification of our social relationships. This requires the strict application of the tenets of justice and righteousness which avoid even the slightest trace of dishonesty in our business dealings and personal life.

God's Torah not only demands of us to love our neighbor in that we concern ourselves with his welfare and property, but it insists further on a conduct of uncompromising straightness ("Yoshor") which is inspired not only by the letter of the law but is guided by the ethical principle of honesty which, then, would deserve the honorable title of "Yeshurun."

And in an essay titled "Our Way," which also appears in *Rav Breuer: His Life and Legacy*, the rav left no doubt about where he stood:

The so-called Chassid who confines his Avodah to prayer does not deserve this title if this "Avodah of the heart" does not call him to the Avodah of life where he must practice and apply the precepts of Chassidus.

He does not deserve the title if he is particular regarding the Kashruth of his food but fails to apply the precepts of conscientiousness and honesty to his business dealings.

He does not deserve this title if his social life is not permeated by love and the deep interest in the welfare of his fellow men; if he does not shun quarreling, envy or even abominable lashon hora; if he does not earnestly strive to acquire those middot for which Rav Hirsch (in his *Chorev*) calls so eloquently.

Certainly the mere exhibition of a certain type of clothing or the type of beard worn or even the adornment of long sideburns do not entitle the bearer to the title of honor - Chassid. These may be marks of distinction - but they must be earned to be deserved.

From these writings of Rav Hirsch and Rav Breuer it is clear that all aspects of our actions must be in accordance with what it truly means to be a Jew. There is to be no dichotomy; our lives are to be lived so that all our actions are viewed by others as being a *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of God's name).

Most certainly, we are to avoid anything that smacks of *chillul Hashem*.

Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem

Personally, when I read or hear that a so-called *frum* Jew has been accused of doing something wrong, I cringe. *Chillul Hashem* is indeed a serious business and reflects upon all observant Jews, whether we like it or not.

In an essay titled "*Chillul Hashem*" that first appeared in 1975 in the *Mitteilungen* and is reprinted in *Selected Writings*, Rav Shimon Schwab wrote:

The second sentence of Sh'ma Yisroel begins with the command: "You shall love Hashem," which is interpreted by our Sages: "Let the name of Hashem become beloved through you." In other words, we are supposed to lead the kind of exemplary life which would contribute to the universal adoration of [Hashem] and which would, in turn, enhance the glory and lustre of the Torah, adding respect for the dignity of the Jewish people as a Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation.

The very opposite of the sanctification is the desecration of the Name as condemned by the Prophet with the scathing words (Yechezkel 36): "They came to the nations and desecrated my Holy Name, so that one said to them, is this the people of [Hashem] who came from His land?"

Every form of Chillul Hashem lowers the awareness of the Divine Presence in the world. But if the desecrator happens to be a professed Torah observer or, even worse, a so-called scholar of the Torah, then the Chillul Hashem not only weakens the respect for Torah on one hand, but strengthens on the other hand the defiance of the non-observer and adds fuel to the scoffers, fanning the fires of religious insurrection all around. Chillul Hashem is responsible, directly or indirectly, for the increase of frivolity, heresy and licentiousness in the world. Therefore, we should not be surprised reading the harsh words of condemnation we find in the Talmud: "He who has committed Chillul Hashem, even Teshuvoh, Yom Kippur and suffering cannot fully atone for his sin until the day of his death" (Yoma 86).

Rav Schwab went on to write, "All this comes to mind at this time since some perpetrators of Chillul Hashem are making the headlines of our daily newspapers." Keep in mind that Rav Schwab wrote this essay some 34 years ago and therefore does not refer to anything going on today. He pointed out that he was "not sitting in judgment" of those publicly accused of various crimes and that we must certainly wait to see if the indictments are indeed "borne out by irrefutable evidence."

Nonetheless, commenting on a much publicized case of that era, Rav Schwab lamented that "Rabbi so and so, who sits in court with his velvet [yarmulke] in full view of a television audience composed of millions of viewers, is accused of having ruthlessly enriched himself at the expense of others exploiting, conniving and manipulating - in short, desecrating all the fundamentals of Torah Judaism. And this sorry onslaught is repeated by similar allegations, proven or unproven, involving more prominent men who are stigmatized as Orthodox Jews, sometimes even with so-called rabbinic diplomas."

Rav Schwab emphasized that "While it is obvious that the vast majority of loyal and observant Torah Jews deal honestly and correctly with their fellow men, a very small minority of criminal perpetrators suffices to cast sinister aspersions on all Orthodox Jews and, what is worse, on Orthodox Judaism as a way of life."

Any *chillul Hashem* provides ammunition for those who doubt the validity of the Torah "and encourages the desecration of Torah learning, Torah education and Torah influence."

To defraud and exploit our fellow men, Jew or gentile, to conspire, to betray the Government, to associate with underworld elements, all these are hideous crimes by themselves. Yet to the outrage committed there is added another dimension, namely the profanation of the Divine Name.... What a sorry picture that is.

Suppose I have cheated my neighbor or my Government and then I stand in the midst of a congregation of honest and decent men and women to recite the Kaddish which is the prayer for Kiddush Hashem in the world. What audacity! What a shame! Can there be a worse contradiction than the strict Sabbath observer who may also be a stickler for Kashrus and who at the same time violates the spirit of Shabbos and Kashrus during the week with non-kosher money manipulations?

Rav Schwab reiterated his certainty that "The profaners and the desecrators are only a handful of unscrupulous people" but that "it needs only very few violators to give us all a rotten name, aiding and abetting our many adversaries and antagonizing our few friends." He declared:

Therefore, no whitewashing, no condoning, no apologizing on behalf of the desecrators. Let us make it clear that anyone who besmirches the sacred Name ceases to be our friend. He has unwittingly defected from our ranks and has joined our antagonists, to make us all suffer

in his wake. And - noblesse oblige - the more prominent a man has become in Orthodox Jewish circles the more obligated he must feel to observe the most painstaking scrupulousness in his dealings with the outside world.

Awesome Responsibility

The words of Rav Hirsch, Rav Breuer and Rav Schwab place an awesome responsibility on every Jew who seeks to live in accordance with the Torah. We must constantly be on guard to make sure all our actions are beyond reproach, and all our dealings with people - Jews and gentiles alike - reflect genuine concern for *kavod habrios*.

During the year I spent as a visiting professor at the United States Military Academy in West Point, I became aware of the special rules of conduct to which each cadet was required to adhere while in uniform. This included clothing being clean and neatly pressed at all times, shoes shined to the point where one could see one's face reflected in them, hats worn when not inside a building, and, of course, refraining from any behavior not becoming an officer.

The reason for those requirements is quite simple. A soldier in uniform is immediately recognizable as a member of the U.S. military. As such, his or her appearance should reflect well on the armed forces. Dress and behavior that negate the positive image the military wants to foster is unbecoming and subject to disciplinary action.

Whether we like it or not, Orthodox Jews are readily recognized. When a passerby sees a woman wearing long sleeves and a long skirt, he or she assumes this person is an observant Jew. A man with a yarmulke or a hat wearing a white shirt and dark trousers is easily categorized as an Orthodox Jew. Indeed, non-Jews and nonobservant Jews see us and recognize us for what we are supposed to be - Orthodox Jews. Fairly or not, people often judge God's Torah based on how Orthodox individuals look and behave.

A student once came into my office to discuss her grade. During the course of our conversation, she mentioned her family lived in upstate New York, not far from a religious Jewish community. She went on to tell me that she had worked part-time in a store frequented by some of the residents of this community. She then added the following: "They are very impolite. They never say 'please' or 'thank you.' They never treated me as a person."

It pained me when I heard this and I had no reply.

We must make sure all our actions are on a level that others will view in a positive light. If we do that, our words and our deeds will sanctify God and bring praise to those who keep His Torah. Behaving in a manner that in any way falls short of this should be unthinkable to any sincere Orthodox Jew.

Dr. Yitzchok Levine was a professor in the Department of Mathematical Sciences at Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, New Jersey, for 40 years before his retirement in 2008. His regular Jewish Press column, Glimpses Into American Jewish History, appears the first week of each month. He can be contacted at llevine@stevens.edu.

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sanctification or desecration.

Date 09:07, 07-12, 09

Why do our Jewish political leaders "check their faith at the door" and why do we take it from them. Case in point: same sex marriage bill in Albany. Our Orthodox (From lower east side) Jewish political leader, Speaker Sheldon Silver, was found wanting. Twice in the last several years, he co-sponsored the bill and voted for it. Remember, he is a friend of Reb. Dovid Feinstein. Where is righteousness?
HaShem please save us from those who say they are orthodox.
Samuel Matz (Brooklyn)

Orthodox Politicians With Unorthodox Performance

Date 05:07, 07-12, 09

Shmuel Matz, previous blogger, is absolutely right.
Shelly Silver should not get a pass. His support of sodomy was horrible.

Joe Lazar is another "Makher" who is on the radio from time to time. (He sometimes hosts the Dov Hikind Show, Saturday Nights at 11:00-12:00, when Hikind is absent.)

On more than one occasion, Mr. Lazar, a religious Jew, played down the importance of homosexual marriage.

(It is plain the guy does NOT understand this subject and should not be viewed as a spokesman for the Orthodox and traditional Jewish community.)

It is unfortunate that these guys are defended by other naive individuals because of "Israel" or so-called pragmatism.

They are just fooling themselves. (It would be better to have "Goyim" representing us than these guys.)

Yossel Feinberg

An Example Of Desecration

Date 08:07, 07-12, 09

There is no question that avoidance of desecration is imperative in order to navigate the spiritual waters facing us in life.

This definitely holds true for a person dressed up in a "frum" outfit.

My wife recently recounted an incident that occurred as she was walking the sidewalks in a "frum" neighborhood on Shabbos.

She was knocked down by a baby carriage. The baby carriage was driven by a child supervised by her mother who smiled after the accident. No apology. (My wife could not see the approaching vehicle---the baby carriage, since it was behind her.)

I have also been hit by baby carriages in the same frum neighborhood. In these cases, the drivers were young mothers---all dressed "Tsnee-Uhs-Dik", obviously, "frum"--at least superficially.

In one incident, after the baby carriage ran over my right foot, I cleverly remarked--duh: "You just hit my foot with your baby carriage."

The young mother replied: "But you were standing in the way. You stopped." Charming.

The young woman was actually right. I really did stop walking for a couple of seconds. (According to her anti-social thinking, that was ample justification for her actions.) No apology was offered. She continued on her merry way.

Is there something wrong with this picture? You bet there is. The people involved in these incidents clearly perpetrated a "Khilul HaShem". Call it a violation of "Derech Eretz" or just plain "Tip-Shoos".

I would also point out that bike riders in this same neighborhood should not be on the sidewalks as they pose a hazard to pedestrians. (Barukh Hashem, I have not been hit by any of them; but there have been close calls. Most of the drivers are frum boys and teenagers who move on the borderline of recklessness in disregard for the safety of pedestrians.)

Consideration for others should also be an important part of Avoh-Das HASHEM. Rabbi Chaim Shapiro

Prophetic Article In Light of the Arrests on July 23 of Rabbis

Date 05:07, 07-24, 09

How "prophetic" that this article was submitted and published just under 2 weeks before the arrests of Rabbis on July 23rd made national headlines and caused a massive scale of Chillul Hashem!

When will the yeshivos for both boys and girls start teaching advanced courses in Chillul Hashem and in Emes - honesty in monetary dealings?!

Parents - please ask your children's schools to emphasize these subjects!

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