

Kiddush Hashem

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Introduction

The world seems to be obsessed with the Jews. Although numerically we are an insignificant minority of the world population, the media focuses on what we say and do. Any small event in Eretz Yisroel that makes the Israelis look bad is ballyhooed all over the media. Yet, when a similar event takes place in some African country, it often goes unnoticed.

In recent years the secular has become preoccupied with the actions of Orthodox Jews. 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 the gentile world. 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 not, then what we do can lead to Chillul Hashem.

Be a Jew Through and Through

In his essay “Tammuz I” found in the **Collected Writings of Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch, Volume I**, pages 279 – 281, Rav 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, מזה ומזה, on the one side and on the other were they written.” (Shemos 32. 15) On this Rav Hirsch comments,

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.

Clearly, the Torah requires that all of our actions be performed in a manner in accordance with Halacha. 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 HaShem), are accused of 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, ZT”L. In his essay with the above title that originally appeared in Volume XI 1949/50 of the *Mitteilungen* and is reprinted on pages 238 to 239 in the **book Rav Breuer: His Life and Legacy**, Feldheim Publishers, 1998, 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.”

In his essay **Our Way** that appears in the above referenced book, Rav Breuer wrote

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 midoth 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. [Page 228]

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* of our actions are viewed by others as being a Kiddush Hashem. Most certainly, we are to avoid anything that smacks of Chillul Hashem.

Kiddush Hashem and Chillul Hashem

Personally, when I read or hear about a so-called “frum” Jew being 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 on pages 213 to 216 of **Selected Writings**, C. I. S. Publications, 1988, Rav Shimon Schwab, ZT”L, writes

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 G-d 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 G-d 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.” **[Please keep in mind that this essay was written in 1975 and hence is not referring 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, he felt that

.... the Chillul Hashem is there in the worst possible way. “Rabbi” so and so, who sits in court with his velvet Yarmulka in full view of a television audience composed of millions of viewers, is accused of having ruthlessly enriched himself at the expense of others, flaunting the laws of G-d and man, exploiting, conniving and manipulating — in short, desecrating all the fundamentals of Torah Judaism. And this sorry onslaught on our Jewish sensitiveness 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 emphasizes 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.”

Nonetheless, 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 fellowmen, 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 and that means the profanation of all that is supposed to be held sacred by its as well as — in their heart of hearts — by the perpetrators themselves. 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 points out again that he is convinced that “The profaners and the desecrators are only a handful of unscrupulous people,” and even hopes the some of them will be proven innocent. Yet, “it needs only very few violators to give us all a rotten name, aiding and abetting our many adversaries and antagonizing our few friends.”

Therefore, no white-washing, 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 upon each and every Jew who seeks to live in accordance with the Torah. We must constantly be on guard to make sure that all of our actions are beyond reproach, and all of our dealings with people, both Jew and gentile, reflect genuine concern for Kovod Habrios.

During the year that I spent as a visiting professor at the United States Military Academy in West Point, NY, I became aware of the special rules of conduct that each cadet was required to adhere to while in uniform. This included uniforms being clean and neatly pressed at all times, shoes shined to the point where one could see one's face in them, hats worn when not inside a building, and, of course, refraining from any behavior not becoming an officer. The reason for these requirements is quite simple. A soldier in uniform is immediately recognizable as a member of the US Military. As such, his or her appearance should reflect well on the military. 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 that this person is an observant Jew. A man with a yarmulke or a hat wearing a white shirt and dark trousers is categorized as an Orthodox Jew. Indeed, the nonobservant Jewish and gentile public see us and recognize us for what we are supposed to be – Orthodox Jews. Whether rightly or wrongly, people often judge Orthodox Judaism based upon how Orthodox people look and behave.

Not long ago a student came into my office to discuss her grade. During the course of our conversation, she mentioned that her family lives 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.” I cringed when I heard this and had no reply.

We must make sure all of our actions are on a level that others will view in a positive light. If we do, then whatever we do will become a Kiddush Hashem. Behaving in a manner that in any way falls short of this should be unthinkable.