

Parsha Pearls

FROM THE WORDS OF THE GEDOLIM

Emor 5769

Do not desecrate My holy name; I will be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel.” (22:32)

One of the most commonly cited concepts in the debate over Zionism is Chillul Hashem, the desecration of Hashem’s name. The Zionists are certainly guilty of this sin on many levels, yet we often hear them accusing religious Jews who maintain their traditional opposition to Zionism of making a “Chillul Hashem.” Therefore it would be appropriate to spend some time defining what Chillul Hashem and Kiddush Hashem really mean.

The Torah tells the story of how Yosef was tempted by Potiphar’s wife, and he resisted her day after day. Finally there came a day when she was the only one at home, and Yosef “came to the house to do his work” (Bereishis 39:11). The Gemara (Sotah 36b) says: Since Yosef sanctified G-d’s name in secret, one letter of G-d’s name was added to his name (“He made it a testimony to Yehosef, when he went out into the land of Egypt” - Tehillim 81:6) How did Yosef sanctify G-d’s name in secret? “And it came to pass on that day, that he came to the house to do his work.” This euphemistic expression teaches that both Yosef and Potiphar’s wife intended to commit a sin...at that moment the likeness of his father appeared to him in the window, and said to him, “Yosef, your brothers’ names will one day be written on the stones of the ephod, and your name will be among them. Do you want your name to be erased from among them? Do you want to be known as a shepherd of harlots?” Immediately he strengthened himself and resisted the sin.

This Gemara seems to contradict itself. It begins by saying that Yosef sanctified G-d’s name in secret, implying that he held himself back from sin even though no one but G-d would ever know. But then it says that Yosef would have succumbed to temptation, if not for the fact that his father appeared to him and told him that the entire Jewish people would one day know about his sin.

The Satmar Rav explained that we must first understand why the righteous Yosef ever contemplated committing this sin. The answer is that the Gemara (Yuma 35b) says that Potiphar’s wife threatened him in several ways. She said she would put in jail, but he said, “Hashem frees the captives.” She said she would make him bent over, but he said, “Hashem straightens the bent.” She said she would blind his eyes, but he said, “Hashem gives sight to the blind.” The Midrash adds that she threatened to spread rumors about him and make him hated in the mouth of all – a threat that she actually carried out. The Midrash does not say what Yosef replied to this threat. We can assume that this was the threat that broke his resolve. He thought, “If I refuse to sin, she will tell everyone that I did sin. Everyone knows that G-d is with me and the name of G-d is frequently on my lips (Rashi on 39:3). This false rumor will be a tremendous Chillul Hashem! Better that I should commit the sin secretly and no one will know about it, than that I should refuse to sin and make this great desecration of G-d’s name in public.”

But then he saw the likeness of his father in the window. This means that Yosef, who looked similar to his father (Rashi on 37:3), saw his own reflection in the window, and he saw that he was still pure and clean from sin. He realized that his father and brothers would one day be reunited with him, and because of their great righteousness they would be able to see on his face that he had sinned. That would be the true Chillul Hashem, no matter if the wicked Egyptians knew nothing of the sin.

Furthermore, G-d put into Yosef's mind the thought that the ephod would publicize the truth. The Chillul Hashem of a false rumor could only be temporary, for in the end his name engraved on the ephod stones would bear testimony that he had not sinned, as it says (Tehillim 122:4), "The tribes of G-d are a testimony for Israel." And if he would sin, his name would be erased from the ephod, which would mean that there could be no ephod – since every part of the kohein gadol's garments had to be made exactly as described in the Torah (Divrei Hayamim I 28:19). Without the ephod, there could be no Urim Vetumim, no kohein gadol, and no moshiach – since moshiach will establish the lineage of every Jew based on the Urim Vetumim (Rambam Melachim 12:3).

Now we understand why the Gemara says that Yosef made a Kiddush Hashem in secret. True, Yosef knew that what he decided to do would one day be public knowledge, but at the time it was a secret, and not only that - he knew that the immediate result of his refusal to sin would be a Chillul Hashem. Yet he overcame the challenge and realized that the future Kiddush Hashem was more important.

The Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim (3:29) says that Avraham Avinu overcame a similar challenge: "I do not doubt that when he attacked the doctrine of all his fellowmen, he was cursed, despised and scorned by these people who adhered to their erroneous opinions. When he submitted to this treatment for the sake of G-d, as ought to be done for the sake of His glory, G-d said to him, 'And I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you' (Bereishis 12:3). The result of the course which Avraham took is the fact that most people, as we see at present, agree in praising him and being proud of him, so that even those who are not his descendents call themselves by his name."

Jews today who take a stand for Torah and emunah and refuse to accept the Zionist doctrine are often subject to ridicule and scorn. Zionists often claim that their stubbornness creates a divide in the Jewish people and a Chillul Hashem. This is a fulfillment of the prediction of Chazal that in the generation preceding the arrival of moshiach, those who fear sin will be despised and those who turn away from evil will be called fools (Sanhedrin 97a). The challenge of Torah Jews today is thus similar to that of Yosef (Divrei Yoel pp. 316-319).

We must know that a time will come when people will look back and recognize the folly and the heresy of Zionism. Then they will see the Jews who stood up against Zionism as the only ones truly loyal to G-d and His Torah – just as everyone speaks highly of Avraham Avinu today. Then it will be clear that they were making the true Kiddush Hashem – the Kiddush Hashem that really matters. This week's Haftarah begins, "And the Kohanim, the Levites, the sons of Tzadok, who kept the charge of My sanctuary when the children of Israel strayed away from Me – they will draw near to Me to serve Me, and they will stand before Me, to offer Me fat and blood, said Hashem G-d (Yechezkel 44:15). In the same way, those Jews who remain faithful during the Zionist era will be greatly honored in the future and will be G-d's choicest servants.

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