

Shabbat Parashat Emor 5785
Chillul and Kiddush
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One of the most powerful verses in this week's Torah portion teaches two ideas that are related, and that are also central to who and what we strive to be as a Jewish community. Leviticus 22:32 contains two incredibly important phrases. *V'lo techallelu et shem kodshi*. You shall not profane My holy name. And then, right after: *V'nikdashti b'toch b'nei Yisrael*. So that [God] may be sanctified in the midst of the people Israel.

One verse gives us two of the great moral categories of Jewish life: *Chillul Hashem*, the desecration of God's name, and *Kiddush Hashem*, its sanctification.

These sound like maybe they belong to martyrs, or saints, or priests, or people living on some higher spiritual plane, and not to us. But Jewish tradition understands them much more broadly than that. And much more personally.

The Talmud in Yoma teaches this through a verse we know well: "You shall love Adonai your God." The Gemara asks, in effect, how do we live in a way that makes God beloved through us? And the examples it gives are very practical. If someone studies Torah, learns from Torah scholars, deals honestly in business, and speaks pleasantly with people, then others will say: fortunate is the one who learned Torah, fortunate is the teacher who taught them Torah.

The larger point for us is that love of God is not only a feeling, and not only a prayer. It becomes visible in how we live. Through how we do business. Through how we speak to people. Through whether the people around us, our neighbors, our colleagues, even strangers, look at our lives and think: whatever that person learned, wherever they came from, it made them good.

And the opposite is also true. The Talmud says that if someone has learned Torah and is seen as connected to Torah, but behaves dishonestly or harshly, people will say the opposite. They will not only judge that person. They will judge the Torah that person claims to represent. That is what the tradition calls a *Chillul Hashem*. Not only a theological mistake. Not only a ritual failure. A desecration. In business. In speech. In how people experience our Torah.

Which means the question these concepts ask is not just: did I follow the rule? The question is: what impression of God does my conduct leave behind? That is a potential framing for almost every decision we make and action we take, in public and in private.

And I think that is why, after the events of last Saturday night at the Washington Hilton, my mind went to a story from the Book of Samuel. When we hear again of political violence, of an attack or attempted attack in the public life of our country, it is frightening in the most basic way. Judaism is not immune. The day after Rosh Hashanah we still fast for Gedaliah, a Jewish governor killed by a Jewish zealot. More recently it was Prime Minister Rabin. Both killed by those who believed that their cause sanctified their violence and made it holy.

The story that came to mind is one of the most vivid pictures in all of Tanach of what this looks like in a moment of real pressure. And I'm glad to tell you the story turns out differently.

David has already been anointed as the future king of Israel. But Saul is still king. And Saul is hunting David, trying to kill him. David is hiding with his men in a cave. And Saul walks into that very cave, not knowing David is there.

Suddenly, David has his chance. His men turn to him and say: this is it. God has delivered your enemy into your hand. And you can understand why they would think that. Saul has been trying to kill David for years. David is innocent. David has been promised a future. Here is Saul, vulnerable, unaware, alone. If David acts, the danger ends.

But David refuses. He approaches Saul in the darkness, and instead of killing him, he cuts off the corner of Saul's cloak. And even that troubles him afterward.

David could have said: my cause is righteous, so anything I do for my cause is righteous. That is one of the most dangerous sentences in human history. It is how cruelty gets justified. It is how people make themselves judge, jury, and executioner, and then dare to put God's name on the verdict.

David does not do that. He sanctifies God's name not by winning, but by refusing to become the thing he opposes.

In that moment David doesn't act. But that does not mean he was passive. It means he understood that how change comes about matters.

There are absolutely times when we must act. Speak. Organize. Protest. Vote. Advocate. Judaism does not teach moral indifference. It does not ask us to watch the world and call our silence humility. But it does teach us that the means matter. The way we pursue justice must not

destroy the justice we are pursuing. The way we seek peace cannot sanctify violence. The way we defend human dignity can never depend on humiliating other human beings.

And this is where Kiddush Hashem becomes more than a big religious phrase. It becomes a daily framework for living.

Most of us will never be David in the cave. Most of us will not face a choice that dramatic. But all of us know what it feels like to have power in a smaller moment: the power to embarrass someone and choose not to, the power to repeat something we do not know is true and hold back, the power to take credit when we should not, or to avoid responsibility when we should own it. We know what it means to say: I may be right, but I do not have to be cruel. I am angry, and I still have to be honest. I could get away with this, but that is not who I want to be.

These are not small things. Opportunities abound. A Kiddush Hashem can be the person who runs a business with integrity, even when the small dishonesties would go completely unnoticed. It can be the teenager who does not join in when everyone else is mocking someone. It can be the family member who apologizes first, not because they are the only one who was wrong, but because they are willing to be the first one to make healing possible. It can be how we speak about people we disagree with politically. It can be how we carry ourselves as Jews in public, not perfectly, never perfectly, but with enough humility and decency that people can see something honorable in the tradition that shaped us.

V'nikdashti b'toch b'nei Yisrael. I will be sanctified in the midst of the people Israel. Not in the Temple. Not through priests alone. *B'toch*, in the middle of the people. In the middle of ordinary life. In the middle of us.

So maybe this is the question to carry with us this week: when people encounter me, what do they learn about the God I claim to serve? What do they learn about Torah? About Judaism? What do they learn about the image of God in every human being?

This question can change us. Before I act, before I speak, before I respond, sometimes even before I hit send or post: will this sanctify or profane God's name?

Every day, in ways large and small, we carry God's name with us and in us. The work of Kiddush Hashem is to carry it with care. And that work, as it always has, belongs to all of us.

Shabbat shalom.

