

BEGINNING WITH THE END IN MIND

by Rabbi Dovid Green

"And you shall not desecrate My holy name; and I shall be sanctified in the midst of the Children of Israel. I am G-d Who sanctifies you - Who took you out of the land of Egypt to be a G-d for you."

This passage is the commandment for a Jew to make a "Kiddush Hashem"; to sanctify the name of G-d. That is, to bring greatness to G-d in the eyes of the world through our dedication to Him, even if means making the ultimate dedication - giving up our lives in particular circumstances which call for it.

Why does the Torah juxtapose G-d having taken our nation out of Egypt with this commandment of Sanctifying G-d's name? Rashi, the great medieval commentator, explains that G-d is conveying that He rescued us from Egypt on the condition that we sanctify His name.

Maimonides in his great legal work, Yad HaChazaka, organizes his work into many different sections. This commandment is placed in the section containing the basics, upon which all other aspects of service of G-d are built. This section is called "Foundations of Torah." He writes as follows. "All of the House of Israel is commanded regarding the sanctification of G-d's name, and we are commanded not to desecrate it..."

Rabbi Shalom Noach Brezovsky questions the way Maimonides explains this. "All of the House of Israel is commanded regarding the sanctification of G-d's name." Many commandments apply equally to all Jews. Why in regard to this commandment did Maimonides specify that the entire House of Israel is commanded? Rabbi Brezovsky also notes the placement of this commandment in this section of "Foundations of Torah."

To reconcile this, Rabbi Brezovsky quotes a passage from Psalms: "for we are killed for You all of the day," about which the Rashba, a great medieval commentator, provides an explanation: "Is it possible to be killed for G-d daily? Rather this refers to when we recite "Hear Oh Israel, Hashem Our G-d, Hashem Is One...You shall love Hashem your G-d with all of your soul..., which means even if He takes your soul from you. If we stand ready to return our souls to G-d each day, if G-d so desires, then it is as if we had done so, and G-d counts it as if we had. The problem with this explanation is why does the passage state "we are killed for you _all_ of the day" rather than "_every_ day"?

Following a slightly different approach, Rabbi Brezovsky explains that this commandment of sanctifying G-d's name is an essential goal and the purpose of every Jew at all times, every day of his life. That is why Maimonides placed it in "Foundations of Torah," and emphasized that it is

incumbent on all of the House of Israel. It doesn't only apply when a Jew is forced with the choice of committing a cardinal sin or dying. It is meant to be the daily focus of every Jew to prioritize doing G-d's commandments and overcome all of the internal and external obstacles which constantly get in the way of doing so. This is "_living_ to sanctify the name of G-d," as opposed to the one-time "_dying_ to sanctify the name of G-d."

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutzatto writes in his work "Path of The Just" "that we are placed in this world where many are the things which distance us from G-d." If we follow these 'distractions' we end up further and further away from the true good. Sanctifying G-d's name means doing a personal battle against the myriad of worldly distractions which lure us away on a daily, even momentary basis.

The Chofetz Chaim gives an analogy to our mission in this world. A poor man hears that in a far-away country, diamonds can be found laying everywhere, strewn upon the ground, free for the taking. This poor fellow dreamt of making the long journey and becoming a wealthy man. After verifying that this place indeed exists, and making the necessary preparations for his family, he sets out on his trip. Upon his arrival, he immediately begins gathering diamonds into his bag with fervor. Natives of the land notice the odd man enthusiastically collecting the "cheap trinkets" which are in such great supply in their land, and consequently worthless. "What do you want with those, stranger? You've got your priorities all mixed up! Do you wish to know what is of true worth? In our land people will pay handsomely for fish! Stop wasting your time with those silly stones, and start prospecting for a thing of real worth!"

Realizing how foolish he looked collecting the "worthless stones" into his bag, the poor man began the enterprise of catching fish. Starting small, he built up his business until he had become a man of considerable means. As his time drew close to embark toward home, he decided to invest all of his amassed resources in - fish - the most valued resource. With his huge storage of fish he sailed for home. After much time, and great hardship, he indeed arrived in his home-port. There was an emotional reunion, and he then proudly displayed his "great wealth" which he had amassed. By now, no one could bear the odor, as the fish were rotted. The despairing look on his wife's face, if not the odor of the fish, made him realize his folly. Needless to say, he was ashamed and filled with regret. Fortunately, the man remembered one small bag with the original diamonds which he had begun collecting when he first arrived, which he had decided to bring as a present for his wife.

This is the situation we find ourselves in. G-d sends our souls into this physical existence with the goal of amassing "diamonds." These are the Torah's commandments. As there are so few who understand the value of the commandments in this "distant land" we find ourselves mortgaging our lives for the things which have popular value - temporary pleasures, financial wealth, honor, power, etc., and we regard them as an end in themselves. The commandments are cheap and disdained. When it comes time to pack for our eternal home, we find how rotten and putrid our "treasures" have become, and then, we become only too aware of our folly. Then we will search, hoping to find a few real "diamonds" which we certainly will have collected, to bring along, and we will find a precious

few, wishing that we had set our priorities with our long trip in mind.

We are here in this world to bring honor to G-d's name. It is not only in dying for His principles that we bring honor to G-d, but by living with great dedication to G-d's commandments in the Torah. It is easy to lose sight of the most important priorities, and so we must be strong and focused. We must know that we are here for a purpose, and concentrate our efforts on achieving it. Ultimately, we will return "home" with great wealth of true and eternal worth.

Good Shabbos!

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