

THE IMPORTANT SEAT WE OCCUPY

by Rabbi Label Lam

You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among the Children of Israel; I am HASHEM Who sanctifies you, Who took you out of the Land of Egypt to be a G-d unto you ; I am HASHEM. (Vayikra 22:32-33)

How hard or easy is it to make a Kiddush HASHEM? It just may come with the territory!

An elder colleague, Rabbi Chaim Kahn, told us a story from the days when he was heading a Yeshiva in Denver. He had spent a week raising funds in L.A and was on his way home Friday afternoon. While approaching the Denver airport the plane began to experience difficulty with its landing gear, and without the wheels it looked like they had to prepare to make a risky attempt to land. For safety measures they circled the airport for a few hours depleting the explosive fuel reserve and also to allow the emergency crews on the ground to ready the runway with a non-flammable foam lubricant.

On the plane, the crew was occupied with readying the passengers with all kind of scary contingency plans while trying to remain calm and give an aura of confidence in what was a life and death situation. Rabbi Kahn had accessed his Siddur and as on Yom Kippur he launched into a teary confessional, wondering within what type of father, friend, husband, and servant of HASHEM he had been. The more he contemplated these things, the more he readied himself to surrender his soul to his Creator.

When the plane landed it was bumpy indeed but everyone was safe and there was a huge sigh of relief. The emergency crew immediately opened the cabin door, attached a ladder and started to quickly exit the passengers. As people hurried off the plane they paused for a moment and thanked the stewardesses and pilots for demonstrating such grace under pressure. Rabbi Kahn stood last to disembark and glancing at his watch he realized that he had a half hour till Shabbos.

He began to scurry off the plane and he too paused by the crew and thanked them heartily for a job well done. Just then the head stewardess said with tears, "Rabbi, everyone who left this plane thanked us for what we did to keep the calm. They were all looking to us for guidance, but Rabbi, we were all looking to you!"

I was on my way to Seattle Washington from New York and along the way I needed to change planes in St. Louis. On the second half of the flight there was a whole new crowd of people. Now in

my new seat I was engrossed in reading through and highlighting a Hebrew Tanach and I was minding my own business diligently. A seat away from me a middle aged woman was shooting glances in my direction and I knew what was about to happen.

She asked with extra caution, "Can I ask you a question?" I told her plainly, "You just did!" She begged again, "Can I ask you another question?" I told her, "You just did again!" Then she blurted, "OK. I just want to ask you something. Are you Amish?" I told her blankly, "No! Amish people don't fly on planes." To which she immediately said, "I'm sorry!" I told her nicely, "You don't have to apologize to me. Apologize to all the Amish people." After that encounter she withdrew to her book and I to mine but I knew she wasn't through. Twenty minutes later she asked the magic question, "What are you?" I told her proudly, "I am a Jew!" After a thoughtful pause, she asked sincerely, "What do you believe?" I squared off now in her direction. This required a serious response.

I replied dramatically, "Believe? What do we believe?! We are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who were taken from Egypt and who heard The Almighty speak to them on Mt. Sinai some 3300 years ago!" The rest of the flight was respectfully silent, as I too began to appreciate more *the important seat we occupy*. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).