

KIDDUSH HASHEM

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Emor

Kiddush Hashem

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In this week's parashah, the Torah presents many of the laws of the festivals--Pesach, Shavuot, Sukkot, Shemini Atzeret, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. R' Yitzchak Arama z"l (Spain; died 1494) asks what he calls a "strong question": Why does the Torah never mention that Shavuot is the anniversary of the Giving of the Torah? He offers several answers:

First, the Torah cannot logically command us to observe the day of receiving the Torah as a holiday. He explains: There is a viewpoint that there cannot be a commandment to believe in G-d, for there cannot be a commandment unless there is a commander. Before one has accepted G-d as the Commander, any commandment to believe in Him would be pointless; afterward, it is unnecessary. Similarly, the Torah [which necessarily was written before it was given] cannot contain a commandment to commemorate the Giving of the Torah as a holiday.

Second, accepting the Torah is not an event that happens once a year. Rather, a person is supposed to do it every day, as we read (Devarim 26:16), "This day, Hashem, your God, commands you to perform these decrees and the statutes, and you shall observe and perform them with all your heart and with all your soul." Our Sages comment on this verse: Did Hashem give the commandments on this day? Rather, every day a person should view the Torah as if he received it that day.

Nevertheless, R' Arama notes, the Torah does hint to the date when it was given in the section beginning (Shmot 19:1), "In the third month from the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day, they arrived at the Wilderness of Sinai." (Akeidat Yitzchak: Sha'ar 67, Part 2)

"You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among Bnei Yisrael; I am Hashem Who sanctifies you." (22:32)

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam; 1135-1204) writes: The essence of this mitzvah is that we are commanded to publicize our belief, the true belief, to the world, and not to be afraid of any harm as a result. Even if we encounter someone who would force us to deny the Almighty, we should not listen to him; rather, we should be prepared to give our lives for our beliefs. We may not even mislead that person into thinking we deny G-d--even if, in our hearts, we continue to believe in the Almighty. (Sefer Ha'mitzvot: Asei no. 9)

R' Shlomo Wolbe z"l (1914-2005; a leading teacher of mussar) asks regarding the last sentence of the above Rambam: Why should we care if, in R' Wolbe's words, "some thug" errs and thinks that we have denied G-d? He explains: Kiddush Hashem / Sanctification of G-d's Name is more than a concept; it is a reality, a state of existence (a "cheftzah"). If even one lowly person thinks that a Jew is not a Jew, then the quantity of kiddush Hashem in the world is diminished.

R' Wolbe continues: The opposite of kiddush Hashem is chillul Hashem, usually translated "desecration of G-d's Name." R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (1749-1821) writes, however, that the word "chillul" comes from the word that means "hollow" or "empty." Any time one does or says something that implies that he is in a space devoid of G-d, he has made a chillul Hashem. (Shiurei Chumash [unpublished manuscript])

"These are the appointed festivals of Hashem, the holy convocations, which you shall designate in their appropriate time." (23:4)

R' Yitzchak Isaac Chaver z"l (1789-1852; rabbi of Suvalk, Lithuania, and a prolific author in all areas of Torah study) writes (in his commentary on Chad Gadya): According to Torah law, Pesach has five days of chol ha'mo'ed, while Sukkot has six days of chol ha'mo'ed. The five days of chol ha'mo'ed Pesach parallel the Five Books of the Torah, for the purpose of the Exodus was to receive the Torah. The six days of chol ha'mo'ed Sukkot, on the other hand, parallel the Six Orders of the Mishnah. This is because Sukkot, the holiday when we dwell in the shade of the Shechinah (symbolized by the Sukkah) represents our special closeness to Hashem. The Oral Law, of which the Mishnah is the outline, also represents our closeness to Hashem because, unlike the Torah which is readily available to any taker and which, early on, was translated into 70 languages, the Oral Law is only to those to whom it is transmitted. [Eventually, even the Oral Torah began to be written down because it was being forgotten.] (Haggadah Shel Pesach Yad Mitzrayim)

"You shall take for yourselves on the first day the fruit of a citron tree, the branches of date palms, twig of a plaited tree, and brook willows." (23:40)

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach z"l (Yerushalayim; 1910-1995) wrote in one of his notebooks: It is worth

paying attention to how delicately people handle their lulavim and etrogim, as a precious treasure. It is clear that this care is not motivated by the risk of damage to these expensive objects. Rather, the Jewish People are a holy people and they feel a deep love for the Four Species with which they fulfill G-d's command.

If so, he continued, how much more so must one take care to value and love another person, and to be careful with every person's honor--much more so than one is careful with his etrog. After all, with an etrog, one performs a commandment of the Torah only for an instant, whereas there is no limit to the number of mitzvot one can perform vis-à-vis his fellow Jew. (Quoted in Minchat Avot p.62)

Pirkei Avot

Rabbi Yochanan ben Berokah says: "If one desecrates the Name of Heaven in secret, he will be punished in public; unintentional or intentional, both are alike when it comes to desecration of the Name." (Chapter 4)

How could an unintentional sinner be equated with an intentional sinner? Rambam z"l explains: This doesn't mean that an unintentional sinner is punished to the same degree as an intentional sinner; each is punished according to his own sin. Rather, the mishnah is teaching that one who desecrates G-d's Name, whether intentionally or unintentionally, is punished in public.

R' Moshe Almosnino z"l (1518-1580; Salonika, Greece) writes: What Rambam wrote is correct, and any other explanation is "nothingness," for G-d forbid that a just Deity would equate an unintentional sin with an intentional sin. Of course, one who desecrates G-d's Name even unintentionally deserves a very severe punishment, for a person must accustom himself to avoid situations where he might desecrate G-d's Name even unintentionally; but less so than an intentional sinner.

R' Almosnino continues: Why is even the unintentional sinner deserving of a public punishment? To teach the sinner that vis-à-vis G-d, everything is out in the open and nothing is hidden from Him. (Pirkei Moshe)

R' Avraham Azulai z"l (1570-1643; Morocco and Eretz Yisrael) disagrees: It is not unreasonable for one who desecrates G-d's Name unintentionally to be punished the same as one who desecrates it intentionally. After all, how can one say to his king, "I'm sorry, but I forgot that you exist!" That is essentially what one is doing if he asserts that he desecrated G-d's Name unintentionally. (Ahavah B'taanugim)

Letters from our Sages

This letter was written by R' Yekutiel Yehuda Halberstam z"l (1905-1994), the Klausenberger Rebbe in Cluj, Romania; Union City, New Jersey; and Netanya, Israel, to a participant in the Mif'al Ha'Shas project, which encourages thousands of young men and boys to study Gemara and Shulchan Aruch and to complete written tests on 20-30 pages per month in return for a monthly stipend. The letter is dated 16 Tamuz 5743 [1983] and is published in Shefa Chaim: Michtevai Torah, Vol. 3, no. 179.

Regarding that which you wrote, that you have merited to be among those who study in the Mif'al Ha'Shas program and you succeed at the tests, but you are frustrated by the fact that after some time you do not recall what you have learned; you fear that this is what is referred to in the Shulchan Aruch Ha'Rav: Hilchot Talmud Torah which says that one who immediately forgets what he has learned should not study too much [material].

This question does not arise only in the context of studying in the Mif'al Ha'Shas project. Based on what you wrote, even if you would study only a little, you would not remember it to the extent that every halachah you learned would be engraved in your mind with absolute clarity. If so, then you would never learn more than one chapter or one mishnah. However, the Shulchan Aruch Ha'Rav himself rejects this approach, for he writes that a person is obligated to study and be fluent in all laws that are applicable. . . It is not reasonable to say that a person should always learn the same halachah over and over. . . Obviously, a person must do what he can, learning and reviewing by heart so that he will remember superficially and be able to look up and clarify the written halachah [when he needs it]. . .

The style of learning of bekiut / studying large amounts of material and chazarah / reviewing, which is what was customary at all times, and for which we established Mif'al Ha'Shas-to return the crown to its former glory-this is the way to attain a wide-ranging knowledge. "The words of the Torah are poor in one place and rich in another" [i.e., different parts of the Talmud or other works supplement each other]. Most subjects are repeated in many places in the Talmud and one can gather a lot of knowledge about them over time. Furthermore, learning a great deal sharpens the mind and improves one's memory, as you will see over time.

Regarding your writing that you don't remember, you did not write how many times you reviewed. Presumably, you did not review 101 times as our Sages mention (Chagigah 9b). Therefore, you don't know whether you qualify as someone with a poor memory.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adira'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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