

# KIDDUSH HASHEM: THE GREAT SANCTIFIERS

*by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene*

## *The Mitzvah:*

The important mitzvah of kiddush Hashem, sanctifying G-d and His Holy Name, occurs at every point during the life span of a Jew - and extends to death itself not to contravene the three cardinal sins. At the same time, he is prohibited to engaging in any unscrupulous or immoral behavior that leads to Chillul Hashem, the desecration of G-d's Name (Leviticus 22:32)

The life of a Jew is fully-committed to the advancement of G-dliness.

He takes great care not to thwart this objective in the opposite manner: to engage in Chillul Hashem but rather, is exclusively focused on "how to become a vehicle in the sanctification of His Name" in this world.

His whole life has to be a force for this cause.

And nowhere does this manifest itself more clearly, than in the dedication expected of a Jew who is prepared to put his life on the line if necessary, to relinquish his very life-force itself, to sanctify G-d's Name.

Why does the obligation of kiddush hashem require such self-sacrifice even to the point of martyrdom? And how can a Jew expected to sanctify G-d's Name in every set of circumstances?

What is clear is that the Jewish national identity is inextricably bound up with the mission to promote kiddush Hashem. This is their *raison d'être* of their being. And this goes all the way back to Israel's origins immortalized in their founding forefather Avraham's willingness to die in a fiery furnace for his belief in a One, All-Powerful G-d and his absolute rejection of his idolatrous society. Promoting monotheism in a pagan world, the patriarch journeyed far and wide as he went about his mission to "call out in the name of G-d" (Genesis 13:4). And as amplified at the binding of Yitzchak, their descendants, the Children of Israel, would perceive their life force - both in life and in death - as projecting the divine will.

Ambassadors of G-d and proponents of G-dliness, the chosen people's national mission was to be a "light unto the nations" (Isaiah 49:6). Living in the continual awareness and knowledge of G-d, means that they were to be held up to the world as champions of morality, of meaningful living, of ethics and righteousness.

Every single activity -both interpersonal and religious duties between man and G-d - would raise the

banner of the Master of the Universe by glorying His Holy Name. But, at the same time, their demeanor had to avoid desecrating His Name which negatively creates the opposite impact - rather than increase G-dliness it creates a vacuum and void, so-to-speak, of G-d's Presence (the word Chillul (Hashem) is related to the word Chalal, "vacuum"). Living up to exacting standards in private and public life, the Jew is to project a positive impact and aura before all on-lookers. If he is able to broadcast his exemplary behavior for the world to see, he can be a paradigm, a role model to others.

How Jews live and how they die is defined through their relationship with G-d. Their life force exists - was only granted and is only meaningful - as a tool for glorifying G-d's Name at every occasion he finds himself in. By observing the Torah and fulfilling the commandments, even at great risk or self-sacrifice, a Jew is fulfilling his destiny. Outside of this, he "has" no existence.

Their historic tenacity dramatically attests to a willingness to live and die as a Jew. Through the Roman plunder of our Holy Land, the slaughter of the Crusades, the cruel torture at the hands of the Spanish Inquisition, the brutal Russian pogroms and the Final Solution of the Holocaust, there is no shortage of inspiring stories of incredible faith and Jewish bravery, of an unswerving faith in G-d both in life and in death itself. The highest level of kiddush Hashem to the ultimate sacrifice - that of life itself and to be killed because one is a Jew.

So, G-dliness is THE integral part of the Children of Israel's spiritual make-up.

With this constantly in the forefront of their minds, the Jewish people consistently strive to fulfill their distinct role as "Yisrael mikadashei Shimecha, Israel the sanctifiers of Your Name".[1]

And for the Jewish people, there can be no greater honor.

[1] *The blessing of the Shabbos shemoneh esrei* Text Copyright © 2006 by Rabbi Osher Chaim Levene and **Torah.org**.