

I SHOULD BE SANCTIFIED

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

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The Rambam begins his great halachic work by introducing us to some of the most fundamental elements in our relationship with HKBH: belief in Hashem, loving him, holding Him in awe. Poised to introduce us to the mitzvah of *kiddush Hashem*, Rambam unexpectedly offers an introduction that he did not deem important in regard to the earlier mitzvos.² "All of the House of Israel are commanded to sanctify His Great Name, as it says, ??And I should be sanctified among the children of Israel."³ This appears tautological to us. Aren't all of us commanded in all mitzvos of the Torah, not just *kiddush Hashem*?

This is not the only difficulty in the chapter. Rambam writes about those who give up their lives in compliance with the demands of *kiddush Hashem*, that "there is no greatness greater than theirs; about them the *pasuk* declares, ??For Your sake we are killed all the day." ⁴ Are we indeed killed every day for the sake of His Name? (The Rashba⁵ offers a solution to this problem. When we recite the *Shema*, and agree to the implications of the verse "and with your soul," - even should they take your soul - we are credited as if we offered our souls each and every day. Even this, however, falls short of satisfying us. The *pasuk* should read "we are killed every day," rather than "killed all the day."

The *kiddush Hashem* that ranks with the other fundamental mitzvos is not the *kiddush Hashem* of resisting an enemy who threatens to kill if you do not obey his command to violate a Torah prohibition. This does not occur every day. Rather, Rambam means the *kiddush Hashem* of struggling against the *yetzer hora* in its relentless pressure to have us act against His Will. As he writes himself, whoever refrains from a transgression, or who performs a mitzvah, not for any worldly consideration, and not out of fear, but simply because of His Creator (as did Yosef in spurning the advances of Potiphar's wife) - he has sanctified G-d's Name.

The struggle is hardly limited to explicit mitzvos and *aveiros*; all of life's situations keep a person on the front lines of the battle with the *yetzer hora*. (As *Mesilas Yesharim* observes, in order to maximize our opportunities for growth, HKBH placed us in a world of a surfeit of circumstances that can distance ourselves from Him, in order to challenge us to avoid those pitfalls.) With this introduction in place, it is easy to understand the intent of the verse "for Your sake we are killed all the day." Our willingness to act in a manner entirely opposed to our wants and desires is a form of *mesiras nefesh*,

of complete self-sacrifice. We stand ready all the day to completely suppress those wants and desires, to "kill" those parts of ourselves, in His service. (The phrase is used in the same fashion as "the nature of the thoughts of his heart was but evil all the day."⁶) We also understand Rambam's intent in writing "All of the House of Israel are commanded to sanctify His Great Name." While we might suppose that the mitzvah of *kiddush Hashem* applies only to a small number of people whose lives are threatened by criminals, Rambam tells us otherwise - it devolves literally upon all Jews. (The Torah beautifully alludes to this in the aftermath of the *akeidah*, where Avraham spots a ram "afterwards, caught in a thicket."⁷ When the *akeidah* is over and done with, there remains, afterwards, yet another difficult challenge, says *Ohr L'Shomayim*. Extricating ourselves from the thicket of *taavah* in which we are ensnared is a process that parallels the *akeidah*.

Rambam includes *kiddush Hashem* in his short list of foundational mitzvos because it so perfectly reflects Hashem's Will. As the *navi* expressed it, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I take glory."⁸ What brings glory to G-d is that others observing our daily lives can easily sense our constant strain against our natures, our repeatedly bending our wills in His direction, our ongoing *mesiras nefesh* for Him. It is tragic that so many Jews opt to be strict in all aspects of the active obligations, but expend little effort on these foundational mitzvos which obligate the mind and spirit.

It is no coincidence that the Torah readings for the weeks between Pesach and Shavuot routinely include topics like *nega'im*, *tumah*, and *arayos*. This period of time is auspicious to ridding ourselves of the unseemly within us. Similarly, we read portions these weeks that impose numerous demands upon us that we become holy - living within the *kedushah* requirements of a holy family of *kohanim*, of a holy *beis hamikdash*, and of a holy land. *Sefiras HaOmer* is an opportunity to first purge ourselves of the negatives in our spiritual lives, and then to build towards a lofty *kedushah* from Above.

We can explain the importance of this *kedushah* by way of an analogy. A prince takes a bride who not only is a commoner, but spent her entire life in a small village, surrounded by very unremarkable people. The prince works feverishly to teach her first the ways of aristocratic demeanor and etiquette, and then the additional refinements of royalty. His wife is a good student, but all his efforts will fail if he does not address her inner person. He must succeed in taking his bride to a different mental place, of shifted goals and altered comprehension. Failing to do that, all her external flourishes will not make her a princess.

A Jew must know that he is a prince, a *ben melech*. He must live the life of a different being. It does not suffice to merely act differently. This changed existence is what we call *kedushah*.

People are puzzled as to why the mitzvah of *kedoshim tihiyu* is not counted among the six hundred and thirteen. There is no puzzle at all. Also not counted among the six hundred and thirteen is a mitzvah to be a Jew! We understand that being a Jew is a *sine qua non* to observance of all the mitzvos. It must precede all consideration of mitzvos.

Halachically, most of us are born Jewish. But that simply leaves us Jewish by birth, by a choice not of our own making. Part of our task is to become Jewish of our own accord, by saturating every fiber and cell of ourselves with Jewishness. (It is possible for people to fully observe every scruple of the law - and yet be fundamentally non-Jewish!) We do this through growth in *kedushah*.

Kedushah is part of the very state of being Jewish; it is simply a more detailed restatement of Jewish being. It, too, precedes any discussion of observance.

¹ Based on Nesivos Shalom, pgs. 96-100

² Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:1

³ Vayikra 22:32

⁴ Tehilim 44:23

⁵ Shut HaRashba 5:455

⁶ Bereishis 6:5

⁷ Bereishis 22:13

⁸ Yeshayah 49:3