

A TALMID CHACHAM OF CHILUL HASHEM

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

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Good Shabbos!*

Dedicated This Year Le'eluy Nishmas Chaya Bracha Bas R. Yissocher Dov - In memory of Mrs. Adele Frand

Chofetz Chaim to His Son: "To Create A Chilul Hashem, You Are Enough of A Talmid Chochom"

The Rambam (1135-1204) in his Sefer HaMitzvos (Negative Commandment #63) defines three components of the commandment regarding Sanctification and Desecration of G-d's Name: "And you shall not profane my Holy Name" [Vayikra 22:32].

This sin is divided into three component parts. (1) Anyone who is forced to violate one of the commandments for which the requirement is 'Be killed, rather than transgress'; (2) A person commits a sin for which they have no sensual passion and derive no benefit, but their intent is only to be (spiritually) rebellious and to throw off the Yoke of Heaven; (3) A person with a reputation for piety does an action which appears in the eyes of the masses to be a sin. Even if the act is intrinsically permitted, if such a person does this act - it could be a Desecration of G-d's Name (Chilul HaShem).

The third category is speaking of a Rabbi or Talmid Chochom [scholar] or a distinguished individual, who does a perfectly permissible act, but it is an act which people do not expect from such a person. If another person did the same act, no one would bat an eyelash or think twice about it. But for a person of this caliber, it may cause a Chilul HaShem.

In his legal code, the Ramba"m is even more explicit [Mishneh Torah: Yesodei HaTorah 5:11]: "If a person who is a great Torah authority, renowned for his religiosity, does something which causes

people to 'talk' (merannenim acharav), even though this is not a sin (per se), it is a Desecration of G-d's Name (which IS a serious sin)".

The Chofetz Chaim once sent his son on a mission. The Chofetz Chaim warned his son to be careful as to how he acts. For if he would act in a fashion which was even slightly inappropriate ("es past nisht") for a Torah scholar, it would be a Desecration of G-d's Name. Rav Pam relates that the Chofetz Chaim's son inquired of his father, "But, I am not a Talmid Chochom? I certainly do not fall into the category regarding which the Rambam writes 'a great Torah authority, an individual renowned for his religiosity...' I am a simple Jew." The Chofetz Chaim responded, "To create a Chilul Hashem, you are enough of a Talmid Chochom".

I would like to pasken a Halacha. Every visibly religious Jew today has the status of a Talmid Chochom vis a vis the Rambam's third category of Chilul HaShem. The people with whom you come into contact - be it in the supermarkets or the gas station attendants, wherever it may be - each of them looks at you as a 'Rabbi', a 'Torah Scholar', a 'Great Individual'. Today every religious Jew may be mistaken as a 'Rabbi' in the eyes of the public.

It is not fun to carry around such a title. It is a tremendous responsibility. In theory, this third category of the Rambam's list of Chilul HaShem components does not apply to every Jew. In the time of the Rambam, people knew that there were people like the Rambam, and then there were ordinary people. Therefore, the Rambam could codify a dichotomy of acceptable behavior for the masses and acceptable behavior for a great personage. Today however, regarding this halacha, everyone falls into the category of great personage. This is not my own idea. This was the ruling of the Chofetz Chaim to his son: "For this you are enough of a Talmid Chochom."

The Chasam Sofer (1762-1839) mentions in his Responsa, the pasuk [verse] "You shall be found innocent before G-d and before Israel" [Bamidbar 32:22]. (This pasuk is mentioned in the context of Moshe's response to the request of the Tribes of Gad and Reuven to receive their inheritance on the eastern side of the Jordan River.) The Chasam Sofer questions why Moshe first warned them to be clean before G-d and only later mentioned they should be clean before Israel. One would assume that the easier thing should be mentioned first and then the more difficult thing. The Chasam Sofer infers that we learn from here that it is easier to be deemed 'clean' in G-d's calculations than to be deemed 'clean' in the calculations of other people.

The Chasam Sofer states that this is what is referred to in Shlomo's [Solomon's] teaching "There is no righteous person on earth who does only good and does not sin" [Koheles 7:20]. No one can escape the suspicion and criticism of his fellow man, even for actions that G-d is willing to judge favorably. The Chasam Sofer adds that he suspects that even the Tribes of Gad and Reuven did not totally fulfill Moshe's admonition. They did fulfill the terms of the deal as Moshe specified. They went across the Jordan and led their brethren in battle. They did not return home to their inheritance until after the period of conquest and settlement of the other tribes. However, says the Chasam Sofer,

despite all this, people still had complaints about the actions of these two tribes. People said, "Their families are settled already, things are calm over there across the Jordan. We are still living out of suitcases over here. The battles are still raging over here..." People find what to complain about.

The Chasam Sofer further states that it was for this reason that the Tribes on the East Bank of the Jordan were the first ones to go into Exile. Even though they technically lived up to their part of the deal and as far as G-d was concerned, they did come out 'clean'; the 'people' never forgave them. There were always complaints against them. They did not come out totally 'clean' in the eyes of Israel. And for this reason, they were the first tribes to suffer the punishment of Exile. This is a very scary thought.

I would like to end with the words of Rabbeinu Bachya (1263-1340) on this Parsha. The pasuk says "And you shall not desecrate my Holy Name, and I will be sanctified before the eyes of Israel (22:32)". This seems to be a strange symmetry. The juxtaposition of Chilul HaShem [desecration] with Kiddush Hashem [sanctification] in one breath is very peculiar.

Rabbeinu Bachya notes that the atonement for Desecration of G-d's name is the combination of Yom Kippur, suffering, and death. (Only death brings the final atonement.) He points out (as does Rabbeinu Yona and other Rishonim) that there IS an appropriate repentance for Chilul HaShem: Kiddush HaShem. It is for this reason that the pasuk here places them together. Be certain to never desecrate G-d's Name. But if you ever do it, there is one way out - Sanctification of His Name.

If a person's actions turn people off from Judaism, causing people to say, Heaven forbid, "If this is how a religious Jew acts, we want no part of it", there is still a way out: "...And I will be Sanctified before the eyes of the children of Israel". This refers to that which the Talmud says, "A person whose business dealings with his fellow man are pleasant, about him people say 'Happy is the one who learned Torah; Happy is the one who taught him Torah.' [Yoma 86a]". This demonstration of Torah's true potential, as well as the drawing of people closer to Torah allow G-d to proclaim on such people "You are my servant Yaakov, through whom I obtain Glory" [Isaiah 49:3]. This, in truth, is the only antidote possible for one who has made a Chilul HaShem.

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.
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This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#281). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Kiddush Hashem: Is "Giluy Arayus" Ever Permitted? The other halachic portions for this Parsha from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

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