

NO BENEFIT

by Rabbi Raymond Beyda

"And you shall not desecrate the name of My holiness, and I shall be sanctified amidst the people of Israel" Vayikra 22:32

When the Hafetz Hayim Zt'l contemplated the serious nature of the sin of desecrating G-d's holy name tears would fill his eyes. He realized that although many people mistakenly believe that a dastardly act done in public is what constitutes this transgression --the fact of the matter is degradation of even one misvah is considered hilul Hashem [desecration of G-d's name].

Maimonides says: "Anyone who knowingly and without duress transgresses one of the commandments of the Torah with intent to anger (Hashem), is considered one who is desecrating the name of Hashem". [Hilkhos Yesodeh HaTorah 5:10]

The logic follows that both the one who speaks and the one who accepts lashon hara both violate the command not to desecrate G-d's name because there is no overwhelming physical desire and no personal pleasure derived from doing the sin of lashon hara. Since the normal extenuating circumstance of one's bestial, physical nature overwhelmingly desiring things negative to the will of G-d does not enter the picture when one speaks lashon hara -- this sin is equated with rebelliously throwing off the yoke of Heaven i.e. hillul Hashem. The Gemara tells a parable about a meeting of all the animals. All of the beasts confronted the snake.

"We all kill in order to eat and survive but what benefit do you get when you bite with your poison?"

The snake replied: "And what benefit does the speaker of Lashon Hara get?"

Of course, this is true with any member of the Jewish people but when a respected dignitary, a wealthy or a learned man or woman, a high profile personality whose behavior is watched and admired by others speaks negatively about others -- the seriousness of the offense is compounded many times over. The worst level of course, is when a respected individual desecrates G-d's name in front of many observers.

Today -- all Jews are ambassadors of G-d. We are required to act according to a higher standard than our neighbors and co-workers in order to bring glory to the name of G-d. The Mesilat Yesharim says: "One must carefully scrutinize and ponder all that he does so that a disgrace to the honor of Heaven should not result." Whether on vacation, in the workplace or just walking the streets -- all eyes are upon us.

The Hafetz Hayim never did anything to embarrass his boss -- G-d -- because he loved and feared Him. We too should try our best to ALWAYS be on our best behavior so that others will admiringly say, "How fortunate are these people who have Torah, How fortunate are their parent's and teachers for giving them the Torah -- How great is their G-d for creating human beings who live by His Torah." This is the opposite of hilul Hashem - -behavior that elicits this kind of response is called Kiddush Hashem.

DID YOU KNOW THAT

It is forbidden to give money to a non-Jew on Friday before Shabbat so that he can purchase something for the Jew on Shabbat. It is forbidden even if the money is transferred to the non-Jew at the beginning of the week.

If a letter arrives on Shabbat, it is permitted to ask the non-Jew to open it so that the Jew can read the letter. There are some authorities who do not allow one to ask directly but instead allow the letter to be opened for the Jew by the non-Jew only if the Jew asks in a "hint" -- for example, he says: "I can't open this letter".

[Source: Yalkut Yosef, Hilkhos Shabbat, Siman 307:13,18]

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