



Light of Torah

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By Teresa Pirola

'Hallowed be your Name'

Leviticus 22:32 has been called 'Israel's bible in miniature.' This verse describes two of Judaism's key commandments.

First, it warns against profaning the Divine Name. Then it calls for the Divine Name to be sanctified ('hallowed') by Israel.

In Jewish teaching, this double-command is for every Jew, to be fulfilled by the witness of his/her life.

"You are not to profane my holy name, that I may be hallowed amid the children of Israel; I am the Lord, the one-who-hallows you" (Leviticus 22:32).

Although spoken to Israel's priests, this command has long been applied to the whole of Israel. The Hebrew term for sanctifying the Lord's Name is *Kiddush HaShem*. We are hallowed by God's holiness that we might hallow God's Name.

Kiddush HaShem is to act in a loving and just way so that those who witness it become aware of the presence of God in their midst. God calls us into a relationship of love, and all our thoughts and deeds, every aspect of our lives, should reflect the holiness of our Creator. Abraham Heschel, the great 20th century American Jewish scholar said, "Just to be is a blessing, just to live is holy."

There is a famous *Kiddush HaShem* recorded in the Talmud:¹

Rav Shimon ben Shetach's students bought a donkey for their teacher from a person from outside the Jewish community. They discovered a precious stone attached to the donkey unbeknown to the seller. Rabbi Shimon ordered them to return it. When questioned why it was necessary to do so since the law did not require it, Rav Shimon replied that his goal in life was not amassing wealth. Rather he desired hearing a non-Jew blessing God more than all the wealth in the world!

Of course, the command to sanctify God's name is for Christians too. Says Sr Ann Kelly, fmdm, of Lusaka, Zambia:

"While studying this portion with my Torah study partner, we became aware of a new meaning to the Lord's Prayer. When we pray 'hallowed (holy) be your name' we are expressing something which is integral in the Jewish spirituality of Jesus, the deep sense of the holiness of God's name. These words call us to constant conversion. The personal Divine mission for each of us in this world is to sanctify God's Name. We all have daily challenges to do this."

According to a Talmudic text, the sublime love of God calls for the active engagement of one's whole life, even unto death where death is preferable to desecrating the Name of God in public apostasy. However, while acts of martyrdom feature in Jewish history, biblical and rabbinic sources view *Kiddush HaShem* primarily as an expression of faith in the day-to-day realities of living. •

Faith & Life: Pray the Lord's Prayer ('Our Father'), more slowly than usual, meditating on those words, "*Hallowed be your name...*" and on the Jewish teacher who taught them to us (see Mt 6:9-13). Allow these words to give your day its prayerful rhythm and focus.

1. Yerushalmi Bava Metzia 2:5

Sources: Based on the *Parashah Emor* commentary by Ann Kelly, fmdm, 2008, Bat Kol Institute, Jerusalem (batkol.info)

Other works consulted: Fox, *The Five Books of Moses* (NY, 1995); Leibowitz, *New Studies in Vayikra, Vol 2* (NY, 1996); Munk, *The Call of the Torah* (NY, 1992).