

In Parshas Emor, the Torah commands us to sanctify the name of Gd, ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל. The corresponding negative Mitzvah (לא תעשה) is stated in the first half of the verse, not to blaspheme the sanctified name of Gd (ולא תחללו את שם קדשי). From this verse, we derive the obligation to submit to death, מצות יהרג ועל יעבור, for the "big three", rather than transgress illicit sexual relationships, murder or idolatry. There are also other situations when one must surrender his life, for instance during a period of religious persecution, שעת השמד, a period of religious coercion. One fulfills the obligation to sanctify Gd's name, מצות קדוש השם, when he submits to martyrdom in such situations. By not submitting, he violates the prohibition against חלול השם (desecrating Gd's name).

Rambam (פרק ה' הלכות יסודי התורה) discusses the laws of חלול השם and קדוש השם. He begins with the laws of מצות יהרג ועל יעבור and concludes with additional situations of חלול השם such as casting aspersions on the Torah or its scholars. He cites examples, based on the Gemara (Yuma 86a), including a scholar who purchases on credit, or who walks 4 cubits without Tefillin. Rambam intentionally connected these different forms of חלול השם in the same chapter. The Gemara (Sanhedrin 61b) quotes the dispute between Abaye and Rava whether one violates the prohibition against worshipping idolatry if he does so out of fear of being killed. Tosfos asks, if he does not violate the prohibition in this case, then why else would there be a מצות יהרג ועל יעבור?

In Sefer Hamitzvos (Aseh 9), Rambam says that there is an obligation to sanctify the name of Gd and to offer our lives in order that the oppressor not think that we have succumbed to denying our faith (עובר על הדת), even though the Jew knows full well in his heart that he is steadfast in his faith. This is essentially the story of Chana and her children, who refused to bow before an idol (See Gittin 57b) even when their action would have been clearly understood as picking up the ring and not worshipping the idol. Even if there is no transgression of idolatry per se, one must still fulfill the obligation of קדוש השם to clearly demonstrate that the Jew cannot be coerced to surrender his faith.

Rambam quotes the example of Chanania, Mishael and Azariah who were thrown into the furnace because they refused to bow before Nebuchadnezzar. Rambam notes their strength of will and courage at a time when all people, including Jews, bowed before Nebuchadnezzar the megalomaniac, and no one stood up to sanctify the name of Gd. Instead, all the people feared the king, bringing great shame on all of Israel, as they neglected and forgot the obligation of קדוש השם. Their act of קדוש השם, according to Rambam, returned honor to Israel. Rambam stresses that the

obligation of קדוש השם is paramount especially during exceptional situations, similar to where the entire world was fearful of a wicked king.

At Mount Sinai, Gd gave the first set of Tablets, לוחות and the Torah to the Jews through קולי קולות, accompanied by tumultuous sounds. Rashi comments that the second לוחות were given without accompanying fanfare. There was an audience of one as Moshe alone ascended the mountain and received the לוחות שניות. The tumultuous manner in which the first לוחות were given was an עין הרע, an evil omen, that presaged the eventual destruction of those לוחות. The question is why did Gd give the first לוחות through קולי קולות even though He knew full well that this would be a harbinger of their ultimate destruction?

Gd wanted the nations of the world to recognize the greatness of the Jewish Nation. Abraham was held in the highest regard by the nations of the world. Isaac's prestige was diminished relative to Abraham and Jacob's prestige even more so than Isaac. Ultimately Jacob's children were enslaved by their hosts, the Egyptians. Had the Jews been respected, it would have been very difficult to enslave them. Gd wanted to ensure that His chosen nation received the respect Gd's chosen nation deserved. The respect came about through the exodus from Egypt and the first קבלת התורה, receiving of the Torah, soon afterward. The nations of the world were gripped with palpable fear, חיל אהזו יושבי פלשת (which Rambam says refers to the events at Mount Sinai and not the splitting of the Reed Sea). All the nations recognized His greatness and the uniqueness of His chosen Jewish, thus restoring the honor of Bnay Yisrael. The קולי קולות at the giving of the first לוחות at Mount Sinai confirmed that Gd chose the Jewish Nation and they are truly special.

After the destruction of the Temple, the Jews again lost their aura of respect and were looked down upon by the other nations of the world. The honor of the Chosen Nation had to be restored and it had to be done through a public act of קדוש השם. Gd told Isaiah that in the future, the people will indeed perform an act of קדוש השם. Years later, Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah performed that act and restored the honor of the Jewish People when they stood against Nebuchadnezzar and reminded the people of the obligation of קדוש השם. Nebuchadnezzar's forcing them to bow before the idol was Gd's plan for restoring the honor of the Jewish People, through their act of defiance.

חלול השם includes an obligation to submit to death to prevent the honor of Israel being diminished. That is why Rambam includes the different forms of חלול השם, idolatry, illicit relationships, murder or a scholar who acts in a way that brings shame on Torah and himself: all of the above share the common property of

diminishing the honor of the Jewish People. According to Rambam, when a Jew worships idolatry, even under coercion, there is still an aspect of חילול השם because he has diminished the honor of the Jewish People.

Borrowing from various ideas of the Rav ZT”L, I would add that the establishment of the State of Israel was so very important to us as Jews in that it re-asserted our historical significance and, often grudgingly, respect for the Jewish People. They may still despise us, but at least they respect us as well. After the inconsolable tragedy of the Holocaust, Medinat Yisrael was a clear message to us, קולי קולות, that we were still Gd’s Chosen Nation. Christian theology maintained that the Jew and Judaism were rejected by God, as evidenced by the destruction of the Temple, the exile of the Jewish People and most recently the Holocaust. The re-establishment of the State of Israel, with all its issues, accorded respect to a suffering and shattered people, bereft of hope and support from other nations. The establishment of the State of Israel showed us, and the faiths and people of the world, that Gd never rejected us. Our faith in the coming of the Messiah and the ultimate redemption is well placed.

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