

## Parshas Emor – Bernhard Bergman (reprint)

י"ג אייר תשע"ו – 21st May 2016 – שבת פ' אמור

We've all heard it said at some time or other .... "such and such an action (committed by a Jew) was a real chillul Hashem (profanation of G-d's name)". Be it inconsiderate driving, queue-jumping or dubious financial or fiscal dealings, we intuitively understand that any action committed by someone who can be identified as a Jew – and all the more so as an observant Jew – which reflects badly on Yiddishkeit in the eyes of our Gentile neighbours, is a chillul Hashem.

In this week's sedrah we are simultaneously warned against desecrating G-d's name and at the same time commanded to sanctify it: "You shall not profane My holy Name and I shall be sanctified among the Children of Israel, ...." (Leviticus 22:32).

The Rambam, in his Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah (chapter 5) discusses the concept of the profanation of G-d's name. Essentially, we can group the Rambam's explanations into three categories:-

1. Religious persecution – were one to be forced (on pain of death) by a non-Jew to violate a commandment of the Torah. Depending on one or more of a number of factors, namely (a) the nature of the commandment involved, (b) the motivation of the persecutor, (c) whether or not the transgression will be witnessed by a minyan (of Jews) and (d) whether or not it occurs at a time of a general religious persecution, one may, under certain circumstances, be required to allow oneself to be killed rather than to disobey the Torah. One who follows this correct course of action is said to have sanctified Hashem's name, and conversely, one who does not is said to have profaned it.
2. Contemptuous provocation – this is a chillul Hashem that occurs in the unfortunate case where a Jew, of his own volition, contemptuously violates a mitzvah of the Torah, for no other reason than to provoke Hashem.
3. A miscellaneous category – includes deeds or actions, that are not in or of themselves forbidden, but which when committed by people of great stature in Torah, will cause (other Jews) to start murmuring (see also Gemorrah Yomah, 86a).

The Rambam's explanation of what involves a profanation of Hashem's name does not explicitly appear to include a concern with giving Jews, Judaism and even Hashem a bad name amongst the Gentiles. Yet intuitively we would all feel that actions of such a nature are also to be avoided. We find that no lesser people than Avraham Avinu (in the incident regarding the destruction of Sodom and Amorah – Genesis 18:23-25) and Moshe Rabeinu (following the incident of the Golden Calf – Exodus 32:11-12) expressed extreme concern for Hashem's honour in the eyes of the Gentiles. In the Haftorah of Parashas Parah (Yechezkel 36:16-38), Yechezkel relates that Hashem Himself, out of His concern for the profanation of His name amongst the nations of the world, would gather in the dispersed Jewish exiles and return them to their land.

Rabbi Moshe of Coucy (13th century), in his SeMaG (Sefer Mitzvos Gedolos), Prohibition No. 2, was at pains to point out that dishonest dealings with the nations falls into the category of chillul Hashem because of the murmurings it will provoke against Israel and their religion.

Thankfully (and b'li ayin horoh), we currently live in a malchus shel chesed (a regime of kindness) with respect to being able to practise our religion openly and freely. The life-and-death tests of chillul and kiddush Hashem faced by our previous generations are not ever-present on our minds. However, even in this benign regime we can and must strive to avoid any hint of a chillul Hashem, whether amongst our own People or amongst our host nations.