

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Parshat Emor

Preparation

In our parsha we have the commandment to make a Kiddush Hashem which means to bring about honor to God through our actions. This mitzvah, commandment, is an important principal in the Torah. God created us to be His representatives on earth. When we carry out this duty by acting with respect towards others, people notice our actions and they learn how God dictates that we should act. The mitzvah is fulfilled on many levels. The most basic application is that of doing good deeds; the most extreme fulfillment is one whose life is taken by enemies simply because he is a Jew. Let us explore this concept.

Ethicists have studied the impressive moral standards of Jewish businessmen and have stressed how impressed they were with Jewish honesty and integrity. I recently read an article describing the great trust and commitment captured by a simple handshake given in the Jewish Hasidic diamond district in Manhattan. Millions of dollars in business is carried out with a simple verbal commitment and handshake. This is one form of Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying God's name in the world.

Famous Martyr

Rabbi Akiva, whom we wrote about last week, is a famous sage whose life ended by death at the hands of the Romans. His sin: teaching the word of God to His people. Rabbi Akiva fulfilled the commandment of sanctifying God's name through the ultimate sacrifice of his own life. He was murdered by the Romans on account of his teaching Torah to the Jews. The Talmud (Berachos 61a) tells us that when the Romans began to comb Rabbi Akiva's back with iron combs, their most famously painful torture in those days, the students heard Rabbi Akiva their teacher reciting the Shema and accepting God's decree. They asked him, "Rabbi, does the command go this far?" He replied, "my whole life I was prepared to fulfill this command and now I have arrived." Where did Rabbi Akiva get this strength?



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Entire Life

Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz (1565-1630) asks, how did Rabbi Akiva find the strength to bring out this greatness? He explains that what Rabbi Akiva answered his students was that the way that he got to the level of being able to actively accept God's will was by practicing and imagining his fulfillment everyday. When we plan and practice ahead of time then we are able to perform at the most important moments of truth. Rabbi Akiva lived his life with the goal of sanctifying God's name. He treated others with respect, followed the Torah and prepared himself mentally to even give up his life for God if the situation arose. We too strive to follow in Rabbi Akiva's lead by living our lives for the sake of God.

Life is about preparation. We should not try to learn a new character trait when we are pressed to do so, as it is almost impossible to change so drastically on such short notice. Rather we should learn and practice new skills and traits slowly and preferably before a situation arises. This way we can come prepared to an anticipated situation. If one is working on being more patient with his children, he shouldn't wait until he is frustrated, upset and overwhelmed by his kid's actions and only then begin to think about ways to stay calm. Rather, on a calm day he should think about possible things that his kid does that get him upset and devise ways in which he can stay calm and solution-focused when it becomes relevant.

Indeed, this is the entire theme of counting Sefirat Haomer. We are counting and actively preparing for Shavuot. Everyday we have the opportunity to contemplate and prepare for our own acceptance of the Torah on Shavuot. Rabbi Akiva was a lofty sage who gave up his life for God. We have the opportunity to dedicate our lives to spiritual pursuits as well. May we all succeed in preparing ourselves for the things in life that are important to us.

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