

AN INTERPRETATION OF THE KADDISH;  
Its Relevance to the Mourner

One of the greatest and most powerful ideals in all of Judaism is Kiddush Hashem, and its obverse, Hillul Hashem.

This concept is based on the idea that man's mission in the world is to represent God, that his duty is to enhance the Name or "reputation" of God, and his greatest crime is to desecrate the Name, or in some way diminish the Divine "reputation."

Whether and to what extent man commits Kiddush Hashem or Hillul Hashem depends upon his act, his own identity, and the nature of the people before whom he acts. Thus, for instance, a man who is identified strongly as a Jew who commits an immoral or unethical act before non-Jews, is clearly guilty of the vilest form of Hillul Hashem. Conversely, one such who performs an act of moral heroism or self-sacrifice, has performed the noblest act of Kiddush Hashem.

In general, therefore, any act which brings credit to Torah, Israel, the Jewish tradition, or God -- is an act of sanctification of the Name; and conversely, any deed which brings these into disrepute is an act of desecration of the Name.

According to the Prophet Ezekiel, it is not only man who can and does perform either of these two polar concepts, but also -- God.

Our people was born under the shadow of a promise -- the promise granted by God to our founding father, Abraham, that in the long run all will be well with us, that He will be with us, and that we will prosper and return to our own land. Whenever the people of the world see that Israel prospers, that God is with us, that that ancient promise is vindicated, then they come to acknowledge God, grudgingly or ungrudgingly, consciously or unconsciously. But if they see that Israel suffers in exile, that it is alone and hopeless, then they consider that promise a sham, the entire tradition a fraud, and the belief, the historic belief, of Israel nothing more than an empty shell.

Thus, as long as Israel suffered friendlessly and hopelessly, the great thinkers and historians of the Western world dismissed all of Jewish claims to a special place in providence as nothing more than the perversions of a persecuted people psychologically playing out their fantasies. We were considered bypassed in history, the fossil of a Syriac civilization, fulfilled by Christianity and cast away to wither on the vine of history. God's Name was dishonored.

But when Israel suddenly experienced renaissance, when it gained its independence, and later proved its mettle in two important wars by its heroic actions, the entire Christian world was thrown into disarray. Its theology was disoriented. Suddenly, Christians who considered that Jews were fossils, re-

jected by God, had to come to terms with the new reality: the vindication of God's promise to Abraham. Somehow, the people of Israel were considered unusual -- the secularists were still unwilling to use the word "unique" -- and its history a marvelous phenomenon. Deep within the secularist heart and the Christian heart there grew the acknowledgement that something of that ancient promise was still alive, that it was quickening in the history of Israel. This was Kiddush Hashem.

How does all this relate to the mourner? Actually, the Kaddish was, in all probability, not originally composed for the occasion of death, although there is a theory that it was first recited by martyrs on their way to martyrdom. But whether or not the original intent of the Kaddish was for such occasions, there certainly is a powerful historical bond between this prayer and the event of mourning, and it is this relationship which should be investigated and understood.

As mature people, we know that death is inevitable. It is the most persuasive and final of all logical arguments: what begins must end, what grows up in successive patterns of integration sooner or later must disintegrate. Death must follow life.

We have no quarrel with that proposition. Intellectually we all agree to it, and know that so it shall be. From a purely abstract and impersonal point of view, we may even agree

that it is "good" or proper that those who have lived should die and make way for those of the future. But all of this is purely in the realm of disembodied and impersonal intellect. No matter how wise we are, how brilliant we are, how much insight we possess, nevertheless, emotionally and instinctively and intuitively we rebel against the idea of death. We fear it, we detest it, we reject it, we consider it the vilest evil that disfigures the face of creation. No matter how poor the quality of life, we cling to life tenaciously and we abhor death. Death is evil and it is insufferable.

God is a good God. He created the world, and at every stage He Himself declared: "Behold, it is good." When this pronouncement is actualized, man sees the holiness of God, His justice and His truth. Then His Name is sanctified. But when man senses the breaks, the discontinuities, the flaws in existence, when he confronts the ugliness of evil -- the Name of God is desecrated. Man is thrown into utter confusion, and he asks the inevitable question: How can a perfectly good God create a perfectly rotten world? The fact of evil will not let him rest. He seeks sanctuary in the denial of God, but he knows that that is false. He flees into metaphysics and theodicy, but it fails to satisfy him. He piously denies the reality of evil, but it hurts, like the nail in one's shoe, and its reality simply cannot be denied. He flies into the remote world of

mysticism and perhaps he attains relief, but never a solution. Evil, suffering, misery, hunger, starvation, disease, pain -- these are the elements that bring on Hillul Hashem. And if sickness and starvation and anguish reveal the flaws of creation and constitute a desecration of the Divine Name, how much more so the greatest evil of all, that dreaded specter that lies behind the badness of hunger and starvation and anguish -- death?! With all our intellectual acceptance of death as inevitable and unquestionable, we know intuitively and emotionally and even spiritually that it disfigures the face of God's creation, that it strikes at the basis of our faith and our trust in Him.

What is left for man to do when he has suffered death of a loved one or a dear one, when he has been thrust into this grim, unwelcome confrontation with Hillul Hashem? He has no recourse, no one to whom to turn, save God Himself. And to Him he must turn with the only means left to him: prayer -- the open heart and the halting words. And his prayer must be that God no longer permit Hillul Hashem to prevail, that He now undertake the great enterprise of Kiddush Hashem, of sanctifying His own Name.

The mourner, whose whole frame of reference has been disoriented, whose foundations of trust and faith and security have been undermined by the Hillul Hashem of death, now asks of God: No more Hillul Hashem! Instead, Yitgadal ve'yitkadash

shemai rabbah -- may His great Name be magnified and sanctified. The loss I sustained cannot be rectified, at least not in this life. But let this desecration of Your Name come to an end, and instead let Your Name henceforth be sanctified. May You cease to suffer the presence of death, to tolerate evil, to countenance hunger and degradation and humiliation and anguish. When these are banished, Your Name will be sanctified and magnified, there will be a universal Kiddush Hashem.

We pray that this Kiddush Hashem take place not "at the end of days," not in the "other world," but be'alma di-vera khire'utei, in this world which God created according to His Will. May the world of the here-and-now be restored to full harmony, may it be a world in which "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, and they shall learn war no more." May it be a society which will strive ever more for peace and justice. May man himself find that the breach in his personality and his soul is healed. This, indeed, is the great dream and vision of "the Kingdom of God": ve'yamlikh malkhutei, may His Kingdom prevail.

This, then, is the prayer of the mourner: slowly but surely to emerge from the blackness of Hillul Hashem to the dawning rays of Kiddush Hashem. And when the mourner recites this great prayer, those who have come to pay their condolences and comfort him respond with assent to every word: yehei shemeih

rabbah mevorakh... May His great Name be blessed; may that sanctification take place le'olam u-le'almei almaya -- forever and ever; and may it begin right now: "in your life-time and in your days, and in the life-time of all the House of Israel."