

Dear Chavraya,

There is a story in the Talmud told of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach. Rabbi Shimon purchased a donkey from a non-Jewish merchant. Once home, Rabbi Shimon's students found a diamond tucked into the halter of the animal. Knowing how he struggled to make ends meet, the students expressed delight at their teacher's good fortune. Saying that he had only paid for the donkey, Rabbi Shimon sent his students to return the diamond. His loss restored, the merchant exclaimed, "Praised be the God of Shimon ben Shetach."

This story is often cited to illustrate the meaning of *Kiddush HaShem*, the sanctifying of God's name. God's name is sanctified and God is praised through human relationships that are themselves worthy of praise. Because *Kiddush HaShem* is more commonly used as the term for martyrdom, its deeper meaning as a way of life tends to be overlooked in the shadows of Jewish history. The most fitting way to honor those of our people who have died *al Kiddush HaShem*, for the sake of sanctifying God's name, is to live *al Kiddush HaShem*.

The source in the Torah for *Kiddush HaShem* is in this week's Torah portion, *Parashat Emor*. We are told, *v'lo t'cha'l'lu et shem kodshi v'nikdashti b'toch b'nei yisra'el/And do not profane My holy Name but let Me be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel*. The first part of the sentence offers important teaching about the second part. *Do not profane/lo t'cha'l'lu* literally means, "do not hollow out," thus, do not empty My Name of meaning. The simple musical instrument, a recorder, as that which has been hollowed out to turn breath into song, is called in Hebrew a *chalil*, from the same root. God's Name is filled with meaning through our deeds in relation to others, "in the midst" of community.

To live one's own life as an affirmation of all life, honoring God's image in every person, caring for the earth as God's Creation, so we live *al Kiddush HaShem*. Even in the laws surrounding *Kiddush HaShem* as martyrdom there is an affirmation of life. We are told to live through the commandments, *chai bahem*, and not die through them. Never a rush to martyrdom, everything possible should be done to stay alive.

Expressed in the way that we live, *Kiddush HaShem* is a daily challenge. The Slonimer Rebbe says that it is the central task every day of one's life, *kol y'mei chayav*, that we are to *sanctify God's Name in all of our deeds and relations*. Living with integrity, in the way of Shimon ben Shetach, ordinary moments of human life and social exchange become the vessel by which to fill God's Name with meaning. The ultimate praise for God is to create a more gentle, caring, just and peaceful world. That is what it means to live *al Kiddush HaShem*. Enriched by the striving, may that be our calling.

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Victor