

## **This Week In Torah: *Emor***

Leviticus 22:32—“You shall not profane My holy name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people—I יהוה who sanctify you...”

There is something interesting in this verse; holiness is described as not profaning God’s name. Pretty straight forward, the opposite of “holiness” is “profaning” the name of God, whether it is through our words or deeds. A dictionary definition is more specific to indicate that those deeds are really bad—an affront to God by violating sexual and moral conduct or performing acts that were a direct violation of rituals ordained by God.

RaSHI took a different approach. He saw sanctifying the name of God requiring direct action. He focused on the translation of the phrase “I may be sanctified” to mean something else. נִקְדָּשְׁתִּי, he believed, should be translated as “we sanctify Me” [which doesn’t make sense in any way in an English translation]—he believed that we sanctify God’s name just as we can profane it and in that way God’s sanctity rests amidst the people. He focused people doing something to the throne of glory upon which God can rest. He saw it as doing something as an individual affecting community. RaSHI played again with the Hebrew “*Chidush HaShem*”/profaning God’s name is the opposite of “*Kiddush HaShem*”—a phrase the Rabbis reserved for martyrdom as to indicate that the opposite of profaning God’s name is lay one’s life on the line to preserve it.

That makes one swallow hard—are we willing to die rather than profane God? Sure-- in the book of Daniel, we see that sense of selfless devotion to God. Hanninah, Mishael and Azariah stand before King Nebuchadnezzar and stated: “If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to deliver us from it, and he will deliver us from Your Majesty’s hand. But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.” But do we have that type of faithful fortitude? Rabbi Lavey Yitzhak Derby of the Hartman Institute believes that we all have the ability for some sort of “*mesirat nefesh*” some sort of act of self-sacrifice, perhaps not dying per-se. He believes that there can be an intensity

within us that can inspire us to do heroic and selfless acts—all to preserve the sanctity of God. Those acts might be as the intensity of purpose when we perform a *mitzvah* or the willingness to do for another to save a life or to care for their well-being.

It is an extreme to see *kiddush HaShem* as martyrdom. But there is a lot of room between profaning God's name and sanctifying it. Our job is to live with that intensity that burns within us—that will encourage us to do a little bit more than another who is also created in the image of God. And in that way, God's sanctity can live in our midst... thru the actions we overtly perform.