

“You shall not desecrate My holy Name, rather I should be sanctified among the Bnei Yisrael.” (22:32)

The sanctification of Hashem's Name is a Jew's primary privilege and responsibility. This obligation is all encompassing. To desecrate Hashem's Name is a transgression of epic proportion. It is a sin that, regrettably, can occur with very little “effort” on our part. Indeed, if one sins merely because Hashem's will has very little bearing on his actions, then he has desecrated Hashem's Name. If this is done in public, in the presence of ten Jews, the sin is magnified. The fundamental principles are one's fear of Hashem and his respect for the Divine word. *Sefer Yereim* says that *chillul Hashem* is a grave sin. He goes as far as to posit that one who degrades any *mitzvah* – reflecting a sense of leniency and indifference on his part regarding *kavod Shomayim*, the honor of Heaven – is guilty of *chillul Hashem*.

It is related that when the *Chafetz Chaim*, z.l., would review the words of the *Yereim*, he would weep. He would emphasize the responsibility of a *ben Torah* towards the “outside” world. As a soldier in Hashem's legion, he represents one who is close to the Almighty. People view him in a different light, and his demeanor and dress code should reflect his position and function. If they do not, then he defames the dignity and esteem of his position and that of the Divine Monarchy that he represents. Once the *Chafetz Chaim* was in a hurry to catch the train to Vilna. The *Chafetz Chaim* was not a traveler. If he went anywhere, it was for a significant and compelling reason. As he was rushing to the train, he was stopped along one of the side streets and asked to be the “tenth” man to complete a *minyan*, quorum, for *Minchah* in a *bais avel*, house of a mourner. Although the trip was extremely important, and going to the mourner's house would cause him to miss the train, the *Chafetz Chaim* decided that he should join the *minyan*, so that the mourner could recite *Kaddish*. Why did he do it? Because the mourner who had to say *Kaddish* – or the people who were attempting to put together a *minyan* – might not understand the significance of his trip. They would in turn, regrettably, have some choice words to intimate about him in particular and *rabbanim* in general. This would engender a *chillul Hashem*. His trip to Vilna was not more important than *chillul Hashem*.

In his *sefer Chaim Sheyeish Bahem*, *Horav Yitzchak Shraga Gross*, *Shlita*, relates a story that occurred concerning *Horav Michoel Ber Weissmandel*, z.l., the *Nitra Rosh HaYeshivah*, who was known for his tireless efforts on behalf of *Klal Yisrael* during and after World War II. Two business partners came and shared with him an all too common tragedy. Each had a son who was prepared to marry out of the faith. The fathers, although no longer observant, maintained a “strict” outlook on assimilation. *Shabbos* and *kashrus* represent one thing, but to marry a gentile – that was the bitter end. Needless to say, they were beside themselves with grief.

Rav Weissmandel inquired about the Jewish education their sons had received and how much time the fathers had spent learning with their sons. Regrettably, the story was similar to what had happened to many of those who either settled in communities where there was no Jewish

education, or who exhibited apathy and, at times, anger after the war which caused them to sever their relationship with Judaism as a religion. Rav Weissmandel listened to their story and told them he would like to share a story with them.

After World War I, new territorial borders were set up between communities. In some instances, many regions that had originally been part of one country, suddenly were transformed into two countries. In one city where there was a large Jewish population, the Jewish cemetery was separated from the rest of the community. Hence, the cemetery was in one country, while the “living” lived in another country.

This caused a problem for the *Chevra Kaddisha*, members of the Jewish Sacred Burial Society. While they waited for all the red tape to be cleared between the two countries, the deceased would remain unburied, which is a violation of Jewish law. Finally, a special dispensation was made for the members of the *Chevra Kaddisha* whereby they could go right through to the cemetery without being subject to needless time-consuming inspections.

Once word got out regarding the special leniency enjoyed by the *Chevra Kaddisha*, a group of gentile smugglers decided to take advantage of the “burial” laws. They filled a coffin with contraband, posed as members of the Jewish *Chevra Kaddisha*, and smuggled goods into the next country, all under the watchful eye of the inspectors. This ruse went on for months, as the gentile smugglers made a thriving business out of their “burial society”.

One day a young inspector became suspicious, because the pallbearers just did not give the impression that they were really sad. “Where are you going?” he asked. “We are about to bury a fellow Jew in the cemetery,” they responded.

“You do not look very sad to me. You have been joking and laughing the entire time that I have been looking at you. I do not think you are going to bury any body,” the inspector told them. “Open the casket, so that I can see the body,” he challenged.

“No, no, we cannot do that. It would be against Jewish law to open the casket,” they countered. The young officer did not believe them, and he decided to seek out his superior. The smugglers became disconcerted and started to beg and plead with him not to make them open the casket. Now, the young inspector was convinced that they were lying. He called the lieutenant who had very little patience for this band of crooks.

“Open the casket now!” he said. The casket was opened, and the deceased turned out to be expensive contraband. The culprits began to cry and plead for mercy, “We made a mistake. It was the first time. We have to feed our starving families.” They promised that they would never do it again. All of the usual excuses were rendered to cover up their lies – to no avail.

The lieutenant turned towards them and said, “You are right that you will never do it again, because by the time you get out of jail, you will be too old to do anything. It is a shame that you cried too late. Had you cried before when you were carrying the casket, then you would not have had to cry now.”

Rav Weissmandel completed the story and looked at the two men, saying, “I wish with all my heart that I could help you. Your tears are very moving, and I am sure they are from the heart. Regrettably, they are too late. Had you cried years earlier, when your sons were growing up, and had you been concerned for their Jewish education, then you would not have to cry now.”

What a sad, but true, response. This story repeats itself constantly. Whether it is the wrong focus on education or on our children’s friends – or simply misconstrued priorities on our part – we end up crying too late. While it is true that the *Shaarei Demaos*, Gates of Tears, never close, one must cry before the fact. Afterwards, it is too late.