

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

What is the most egregious sin that one can transgress? Perhaps we should step back a little in order to clarify the meaning of “egregious.” Sin might be relative, but every sin is an infraction against Hashem. So, they are all bad! In the *Talmud Yoma* 86a, *Chazal* address this question. They posit that the nefariousness of a sin is based on the contingency of performing *teshuvah*, repentance. When one transgresses a prohibitive commandment and later repents, his *teshuvah* is in limbo until *Yom Kippur*, when the sanctity of the day atones for his sin. When one transgresses a sin which carries the punishment of death of Heavenly excision, his *teshuvah* will be accepted following the atonement of *Yom Kippur*. In addition, he will experience *yissurim*, troubles, that will cleanse his soul. Last is the sin of *chillul Hashem*, desecrating Hashem’s Name. *Rashi* defines *chillul Hashem* as *choteh u’machati acheirim*, “one who himself sins and (by his actions) induces others to sin.” For him, *teshuvah*, *Yom Kippur* and *yissurim* do not suffice. He must die, and then his *teshuvah* will be accepted.

The *Talmud* continues with a discussion of various instances of *chillul Hashem*. *Rav* said, “If I purchase meat on credit, it is a *chillul Hashem*.” *Rashi* explains that if he is late in paying his bill, people will talk, a process which will lead to the minimization of the sin of theft. Rabbi Yochanan said, “If I were to walk four *amos* without reciting words of Torah and not wearing *Tefillin*.” *Rashi* explains, that for Rabbi Yochanan to act in this manner, it could only mean one thing: he had become weak in his studies, either due to illness or worse. Since people would be unaware of his condition, they would begin to think that wasting time from Torah study was acceptable.

We have before us two cases which appear to present innocuous behavior based upon which the less than astute, the unthinking, might err and think the unthinkable: that such behavior is acceptable. This is *chillul Hashem*! This is the type of sin for which there is no atonement other than death. This seems a bit severe. Let us visualize the scenario the way the master *maggid* **Horav Yaakov Galinsky, zl**, presents it.

Two sinners stand before us. One is guilty of all three capitul sins: murder, immorality and idol worship. This is in addition to every sin imaginable, to which his insatiable inclination successfully steered him into committing. He has demurred from only one sin: *chillul Hashem*. He would never lead anyone astray. The life he has chosen for himself is his doing, his life, his sin. He has no interest in becoming an icon of sinful behavior for others to emulate. Furthermore, he has such a profligate reputation that no one in his right mind would care to follow his sordid path of life. He stands before us today in complete contrition over a life of sin, a life of bad choices, of following his heart’s desires.

Next to him stands a distinguished *rav*, an elderly Torah scholar who has devoted his entire life to poring over the tomes of *Talmud*, *Shulchan Aruch* and the commentaries. His life is the picture of

spiritual health. From his service to Hashem, to his service to his fellow man, he has no gaps. Perfection – except for one instant. He was running late for *shiur*, his Torah lecture to the entire *yeshivah*. They were all waiting for him. So, he surreptitiously stole someone's place in line. Now, these two sinners stand before us, requesting to repent for their past behavior. Whose *teshuvah* will be effective?

The repeat offender who has broken every law in the book will have to repent heartfully, followed by *Yom Kippur* and a heavy dose of *yissurim* – then his *teshuvah* will be accepted. The *rav/rosh yeshivah* will, regrettably, have to suffer through terrible pain associated with death. Does this make sense? The *teshuvah* of the great *rav*, whose life was one long unbroken chain of Torah and *avodah*, will not be accepted. He must suffer the anguish of death, while the fellow who excelled in carving out for himself a reputation as the one who profaned the entire Torah – his *teshuvah* will be accepted. Why?

Rav Galinsky explains that it is actually quite simple. The world was created for one purpose: *kavod Shomayim*, the Glory of Heaven. Anyone who commits a *chillul Hashem* which undermines and impugns the very foundation of the Creation of the world, impugns its purpose and sustainability; such a person has lost his right to live in this world.

While, veritably, we might argue that we are far from the status of *Rav* and Rabbi Yochanan, no one is really going to judge Heaven based upon our actions. *Rav Galinsky* explains that, unfortunately, this is far from true. Each and every *ben Torah* represents Torah Judaism. Thus, when a member of the Orthodox Torah camp acts in a manner which someone on the “outside” deems unseemly, inappropriate, it is immediately blown out of proportion, and every Jew that remotely resembles the one who is responsible for this infraction is equally culpable. This is the full extent of *chillul Hashem*. Thus, if one permits himself to execute any activity which he feels is “all right,” he should think twice concerning how it will appear in the eyes of others – especially those who harbor little love for the Torah Jew.

Rav Galinsky relates a telling incident which underscores this idea. The *Rav* would take the same bus daily from Chadera to Bnei Brak. The driver was a young man who was proper and respectful. One day, shortly after *Rav Galinsky* had ascended the bus and taken his seat, the driver called out, “*Rav Galinsky*, look at how your *rabbanim* act!” The *Rav* looked around to see the *rav* to whom he was referring. Apparently, the bus driver had caught an eleven-year-old boy sneaking onto the rear-entrance of the bus. This was the “terrible” act that one of *Rav Galinsky's* “*rabbanim*” had committed. The only crime was the overzealous outrage of the driver and his subtle form of religious anti-Semitism.

The *Rav* replied, “I am sending all of the young students in Bnei Brak to you.”

“Why?” the driver asked.

“I figure, why should they spend years of study in order to receive a *k’sav semicha*, ordination? I will have them all come to you, and you could ordain them! After all, I see that even a young child is referred by you as ‘one of my *rabbanim*.’”

Everybody understood the joke and laughed. After all is said and done, however, the stark reality of his subtle message was clear. One Jew represents us all – whether he is a *rav*, *rosh yeshiva*, or layman. We live in an age of stereotypes, when we conjure up in our mind the image of a *frum* Jew, a *yeshiva* student, a *rebbe*, a Jewish mother – and the list goes on. We must remember that stereotyping is our failing – not the fault of the person or group who is the subject of our typecasting.

The **Chafetz Chaim** was once in Vilna rushing to catch a train. He had an important meeting to attend. His presence at the meeting was critical to its successful conclusion. Obviously, he was not going to waste a moment in arriving on time. Arriving late at the train station was not an option. Just as he was about there, he met a man standing outside of a *bais avel*, mourner’s home, pleading, “A *tzenter*? We need a tenth man for *Minchah*.” The *Chafetz Chaim* had already davened *Minchah*, and to go inside would mean missing the train. Yet, the sage went into the house and completed the *minyan*, quorum. Why? He could not permit anyone even to think that he was insensitive to the needs of the mourners, that he did not care if they had no *minyan*. They would be wrong, but, regardless of the lack of veracity concerning the alleged critique against the *Chafetz Chaim*, a *chillul Hashem* would be made. This was more important than any meeting that he had to attend.