

Yaakov said to Shimon and to Levi, “You have discomposed me, making me odious among the inhabitants of the land...” And they said, “Should he treat our sister like a harlot?” (34:30,31)

Yaakov *Avinu* rebuked his two sons for putting their lives and the lives of their entire family at risk when they killed all of the people of the city of Shechem. Shimon and Levi replied, *Ha’k’zonah yaaseh es achoseinu?* “Shall he treat our sister like a harlot?” We do not find Yaakov countering their argument, an indication that he conceded to their claim. *Chazal* teach that on the *Degel*, Banner/Flag, of the Tribe of Shimon, there is an allusion to the *maaseh Shechem*, the incident of Shechem. Apparently, if their revenge had been out of place, Yaakov could not have conceded, nor would the Banner have proudly displayed the incident.

Targum Yonasan ben Uziel explains Shimon and Levi’s reply in the following manner: “It is not appropriate for it to be related among the Jews that gentiles acted with impunity in violating/contaminating a Jewish girl, treating her like a harlot; rather, it should be said that an entire nation was decimated because of its role in violating a Jewish girl. Let the whole world see the punishment that is meted out to those who abuse our girls.

Horav Aryeh Leib Bakst, zl, questions this explanation, wondering what the gist of their response was. Yaakov claimed that it was all after the fact. They had violated Dinah. The *chillul Hashem*, desecration of Hashem’s Name, had been committed. However they responded afterwards did not alter the *chillul Hashem*. What was to be gained by risking their lives and the lives of their collective family just to prove a point? What point? The *chillul Hashem* sadly was a done deal. Over. Finished. It was time to move on. These people were savages. Our family is small and weak. They could rise up against us and wipe us out. What did Shimon and Levi achieve with their vengeance?

Shimon and Levi countered, “We cannot allow them to treat our sister like a harlot.” In other words, they argued that a *chillul Hashem* had been committed. We know that. What did their response add to the situation? The *chillul Hashem* was done and complete. It was the Jews who would speak about this in their gathering places. If nothing would have been done to demonstrate to the Jews that a gentile cannot act with impunity against a Jewish girl – then it would have been a *chillul Hashem*. If, however, an entire nation was to be decimated because they violated Dinah, it would mitigate the *chillul Hashem*, showing that no one hurts a Jew and is able to talk about it.

We may offer an alternative perspective on the debate between Yaakov and his sons. In his *Haamek Dayar* commentary to *Chumash*, the *Netziv, zl*, distinguishes between the terms: *zonah*, harlot, and *temeiah*, contaminated (woman). A *zonah* is a consenting adult who agrees to a liaison with another party, gentile or not. A *temeiah* is a contaminated woman who has been violated

against her will. The brothers claimed that if they stood by and did nothing, people would perceive their sister to be a *zonah*, a girl who willingly cohabited with a gentile. This would be a grievous error and a flagrant *chillul Hashem*. By acting decisively against Shechem and his supporters, however, the Jewish People would be sending out a clear message: our sister was the victim of an egregious sin, an act of debasement, a violation of her womanhood and a wanton act of incursion against the Jewish People of whom Dinah was a princess. Perhaps they would not be able to reverse the *chillul Hashem*, but they could see to it that their sister's good name not be besmirched.

Regardless upon which approach we decide, one thing is clear: Yaakov *Avinu* did not counter their argument. What about *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying Hashem's Name? May one risk his life to sanctify Hashem's Name under such circumstances that his actions would not make a difference? The damage had been done. Giving up his life would only add to the "collateral damage." The gentiles would just chalk up another dead Jew. They certainly would neither lose any sleep over it, nor would they be impressed by Jewish action. The following three short incidents, recorded by Shimon Huberband, demonstrate that a Jew acts *al Kiddush Hashem* because glorifying Hashem's Name is part of the Jewish psyche – regardless of one's religious affiliation or commitment. It is who we are and what we do.

In September 1939, the *reshaim*, wicked ones, arrived in Bendin, Poland, and immediately surrounded the Jewish quarter. With the *shul* in the midst, they proceeded to set fire to the *shul* and the houses alongside it. Any Jew who attempted to escape the burning house was shot. Nonetheless, even as the flames engulfed their *shul*, a number of heroic Jews, led by a fellow named Schlesinger, his sons and sons-in-law, ran into the burning edifice. They fought their way to the *Aron HaKodesh*, Holy Ark, and every one of them succeeded in rescuing two *Sifrei Torah*, one in each arm. When they emerged from the inferno, the *Sifrei Torah* in their arms, they were promptly shot by the *reshaim*. Thus, they died *al Kiddush Hashem*. They knew they would die, but they wanted their last deed on this world to be an act of protecting the Torah. These men were the true heroes of the Holocaust. It is so easy for the alienated secular Jew to sit on his couch and question why the Jews went like sheep to the slaughter. Do they even understand the meaning of spiritual heroism? Veritably, how could they, since they have no idea concerning the meaning of spirituality?

The second story concerns an incident that occurred in Piotrkow, Poland. A carful of Nazi beasts arrived one day, drove straight to the *shul*, dragged out thirty *Sifrei Torah* and lay them down in shame in the middle of the town square. They posted a 24-hour guard, lest some Jew "steal" the Torahs. A few days passed, and a Bundist leader by the name of Avraham Weissshof could no longer tolerate the shame of the *Sifrei Torah* lying in the street. He gathered together a group of Bundists, and they devised a plan for retrieving the Torahs during the night when the guards would be sleeping. They did this, and one-by-one they buried the *Sifrei Torah* in the local cemetery. We must remember that the members of the Bund were Socialists/Communists, irreligious Jews who had alienated themselves from their ancestral faith. In the past, this Bundist leader had referred to

the Torah scroll as being no more than a fancy piece of parchment. Yet, he and his men risked torture and death to show honor to the *Sifrei Torah*. How did a group of assimilated Jews risk everything for something in which they did not believe? Obviously, the “essential” Jew lies beneath the façade of external assimilation. *Kiddush Hashem* is a fundamental component of the Jew’s DNA.

The third incident took place in Radzymin, Poland, where a devout *Chassidic* Jew named *Rav Yitzchak Meir Kaminer* lived. The Nazis were savages who relished conjuring up cruel ways of debasing their victims as they murdered them. They felt that as long as a dominant Jewish spirit existed, they would not succeed in destroying us. Here, too, they failed. They ordered *Rav Kaminer* to don his *Chassidic* garb, *shtreimel*, *bekeshe*, *Tallis* and *Tefillin*. They then took him to the town square where they had erected a large cross. They placed him next to the cross and ordered him to kiss it. When he blatantly refused, the policemen threatened that they would not simply shoot him; they would beat him to death mercilessly. *Rav Kaminer* looked them straight in the face and said, “No.” He remained unmoved as they began to beat him relentlessly like wild beasts, until they thought he was dead. After the Nazis left him beaten and bloodied, a few Jews went over to check on him. He was still breathing! Immediately, they picked him up and carried him to a doctor who managed to save his life – a tribute to his *Kiddush Hashem*.

The Jew neither lies down, nor does he back down, because he does not live for himself. Hashem gave him his life, and Hashem will take it when his time has come. Until then, he is on Hashem’s “time.”