

## The people sat to eat and drink and they got up to revel. (32:6)

*Rashi* explains that the term, *l'tzacheik*, to revel, implies the three cardinal sins: idolatry; licentiousness; and murder. In addition to their worship of the Golden Calf, *Bnei Yisrael* committed immoral acts and murdered Chur (nephew of Aharon *HaKohen* and Moshe *Rabbeinu* and son of Miriam *HaNeviah* and Kaleiv ben Yefuneh). He attempted to restrain them and, as a result, he became their first victim. Chur sacrificed his life *Al Kiddush Hashem*, to sanctify Hashem's Name. He is the first and only Jew who died *Al Kiddush Hashem* in the Torah. Surprisingly, there is no overt mention of his *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice. Why?

Veritably, Chur was not the only one to die *Al Kiddush Hashem*. One other man met his death sanctifying Hashem's Name, albeit prior to the giving of the Torah. Haran, Avraham *Avinu's* brother, was given a choice to accept the pagan rite or meet his Maker via the agency of the fiery cauldron in Uhr Kasdim. He figured that if his brother, Avraham, had emerged unscathed, he, too, could pull it off. He was wrong. He was not Avraham. Like Chur, Haran's untimely death is not mentioned in the Torah. Why? Two individuals, perhaps one more devoted than the other, but Chur knew much more, having witnessed the exodus from Egypt, the Revelation with the Giving of the Torah, so he was much more attuned to dedicating his life to Hashem. Haran lived with pagans. Indeed, his father sold idols and even informed on his son to the wicked Nimrod.

Haran had one primary religious role model: Avraham. As a result, he was prepared to relinquish his life for Hashem. Two exceptional people; two unprecedented acts of spiritual heroism. Yet, no mention is made of them in the Torah.

The *Chasam Sofer*, *zl*, observes that their acts of devotion were certainly not glossed over in Heaven. Each of them was blessed with extraordinary progeny, individuals who left their indelible stamp on the nation. Chur died a tragic death. He had a grandson who was but a lad of thirteen years of age. This young boy was selected from among all of *Klal Yisrael* to be the architect of the *Mishkan*. Betzalel was Chur's reward.

Haran is the one who apparently gets by under the radar. He is mentioned in the Torah only slightly in passing, although he was the first person to have died *Al Kiddush Hashem*. This is no simple distinction. His reward? The *Chasam Sofer* observes that Haran did fairly well for himself, despite the fact his act of *Kiddush Hashem* was not mentioned in the Torah.

Haran was Sarah *Imeinu's* father. Sarah went by the name Yiskah, but she was the same person who married Avraham *Avinu*. She was the mother of Yitzchak *Avinu*, the first Matriarch, the progenitress of our People. I would consider this a charitable reward. There is, however, more. Haran had another daughter whose name was Milkah. She married Nachor; their union produced a son, Besuel, who was not a very reputable person. Despite Besuel's shortcomings, he married

and had an exceptional daughter, Rivkah *Imeinu*. Haran became the progenitor of two *Imahos*, Matriarchs. There is still more. Rivkah had a brother, a swindler, a thief and an all-around nefarious person. Yet, he fathered two very special daughters, Rachel *Imeinu* and Leah *Imeinu* – two more Matriarchs who became part of Haran's legacy. Haran was the first one to die sanctifying Hashem's Name. He was blessed with the four Matriarchs and a son, Lot, who was also not an exceptional person. His two sons, Ammon and Moav, however, produced Naamah *haAmonis*, wife of Shlomo *HaMelech*, mother of Rechavam and Rus *HaMoaviah*, Mother of Royalty, and the House of David *HaMelech*. In the final analysis, Haran did quite well for himself. Yet, his act is not mentioned in the Torah.

The following vignette might give us a directive on life, its goal and objective, thereby allowing us a perspective on the ultimate sacrifice for Hashem's Name. One day, *Horav Yitzchak Blazer, zl* (popularly known as *Rav Itzele Peterberger*), one of the leaders of the *mussar*, character refinement, movement, met *Horav Yosef Yoizel Hurwitz, zl* (later to become known as the *Alter m'Novarodok*), who was a promising *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar and leader. Due to a family tragedy, he was compelled to set aside his Torah study and enter the world of commerce, a field in which he prospered. With his considerable profits, he was able to support his greater family. On the day that he met *Rav Itzele*, he was rushing to his place of business. *Rav Yosef Yoizel* stated, "A person must have a source of livelihood. A person must have from what to live." ("*Fun vos vellen mir leben? From what will we live?*") *Rav Itzele* listened and immediately retorted, "I understand, but a person must also have from where to die." ("*Fun vos vellen mir shtarben. From what will we die?*")

The words stunned *Rav Yosef Yoizel*. In a short terse comment, *Rav Itzele* had crystallized the Torah outlook on life. Now, as never before, *Rav Yosef Yoizel* was brought to realize that life on this world has one purpose: to gain entrance to *Olam Habba*. Our world is merely a *prozdor*, vestibule, entranceway, that allows us to gain entry into the World of Truth, the Royal Palace of the King. This comment catalyzed a new trajectory in *Rav Yosef Yoizel's* life. He now began to concentrate on "life" – on living a life totally devoted to achieving spiritual ascendancy. He isolated himself from the world in order to begin a course of intensive study and profound introspection, geared towards elevating his physical life to a greater spiritual standard. In the two years of 1894 and 1895, he founded nine *yeshivos* as part of the burgeoning *Novarodok Yeshivah* network. All of this occurred as a result of *Rav Itzele's* quip concerning the meaning of life.

The above story teaches us a profound lesson. Life is about living for a purpose. Dying – even if it is to sanctify Hashem's Name – does not take the place of life. As long as one lives, he serves Hashem on a constant basis, thereby earning entry to *Olam Habba*, which is the reason that he is alive. Dying for the sake of Hashem is not our ideal. It is certainly better than dying without purpose. Although it is the penultimate way to leave this world, dying for the sake of Hashem in no way replaces the opportunities one has to live life. Thus, the Torah plays down the tragic deaths of these martyrs. We venerate death with purpose. We venerate life with purpose even more. Dying *Al Kiddush Hashem* is a privilege reserved for *yechidei segulah*, unique, special individuals.

*Kiddush ha'chaim*, living a sanctified life dedicated to Hashem, is a way of life available to everyone. We must all aspire to be worthy of this ideal.

Sadly, the concept of *kiddush ha'chaim*, the sanctification of Hashem's Name through daily life, received its greatest reinforcement under the most tragic conditions of the Holocaust. During this period, Jews were admonished to do everything possible to live, because the Nazis were bent on destroying Jewish life. Thus, our imperative was to live and to sanctify the Name of Hashem, remaining committed to Him, despite the persecution to which we were being subjected.

While hiding in Zelichov in the summer of 1942, the *Zelichover Rebbe, Horav Avraham Shalom Goldberg, zl*, responded to the increasingly despondent fellow Jews who were with him, "We must remain hidden; perhaps it will save one life. Every Jew who remains alive sanctifies the Name of Hashem. He is, indeed, a man of courage, because he will not submit to the Nazis and he will not extinguish his own life."

*Horav Menachem Zemba, zl*, summarized the *kiddush ha'chaim* motif during his zealous plea for resistance prior to the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in April, 1943, "Thus, by the authority of the Torah, I insist that there is absolutely neither purpose nor value to *Kiddush Hashem* inherent in the death of a Jew. *Kiddush Hashem* in our present situation is embodied in the will of a Jew to live." He explained that the struggle for survival amid extreme pain and deprivation is a *mitzvah*. It is our *nekamah*, act of vengeance. Our *mesiras nefesh*, self-sacrifice and devotion to live, is far greater and loftier than relinquishing our lives. In this manner, we are being *mekadesh*, sanctifying, *Shem Shomayim*, the Name of Heaven. The Nazis wanted us dead. Why should we have given them what they wanted?