

Text Study: Extracting the Principle of Kiddush Hashem

It is related of R. Shimon ben Shetah that he once bought an ass from an Ishmaelite. His disciples came and found a precious stone suspended from its neck. They said to him, “*Master, It is the blessing of the Lord that enriches.*” (Proverbs 10:22) R. Shimon ben Shetah replied, “I have purchased an ass, but I have not purchased a precious stone.” He then went and returned it to the Ishmaelite, and the latter exclaimed of him, “Blessed is the Lord, God of Shimon ben Shetah.”

מַעֲשֵׂה בֶרֶךְ שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן שִׁטָּח, שֶׁלְקַח חֲמֹר אֶחָד מִיִּשְׁמַעֲאֵלִי אֶחָד. הֵלְכוּ תַלְמִידָיו
אוּ בֹ אֲבֹן אַחַת תְּלוּיָהּ לוֹ בְּצַנְאוֹרוֹ, אָמְרוּ לוֹ: רַבִּי, (מִשְׁלֵי יָכֵב) “בְּרַכַּת ה' הִיא
וּמָצָא
שִׁיר.” אָמַר לָהֶם ר' שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן שִׁטָּח: חֲמֹר לְקַחְתִּי אֲבֹן טוֹבָה לֹא לְקַחְתִּי. הֲלֹדָה
תַּע
וְהַחֲזִיקָה לְאוֹתוֹ יִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִי, וְקָרָא עָלָיו אוֹתוֹ יִשְׁמַעֲאֵלִי: בְּרוּךְ ה' אֱלֹהֵי שְׁמַעוֹן בֶּן
שִׁטָּח.

Deuteronomy Rabbah 3:3

1. What choices does Shimon ben Shetah have when his disciples find the jewel around the neck of the donkey he bought from the Ismaelite? What choice does he make?
2. What are some of the possible motives Shimon ben Shetah has for his behavior in this situation?
3. How does the Ishmaelite react to the return of the precious stone?
4. Why do you think the Ishmaelite pays tribute to Shimon ben Shetah's God? How is Shimon ben Shetah's behavior connected to God?
5. On the plain level, what does Shimon ben Shetah do? On a deeper level (of ideas/values/principles) what does Shimon ben Shetah do?

This story of Shimon ben Shetah is frequently cited in Jewish sources as an example of *kiddush hashem* (sanctification of God's name). *Kiddush hashem*, in its broadest sense, involves behavior that brings honor to God and the Jewish people. Acts can be examples of *kiddush hashem* even if they are not intended as such. *Kiddush hashem* does not necessarily have to be done in a public setting. The opposite of *kiddush hashem* is *hillul hashem*, bringing dishonor to God and the Jewish people.

Read and consider the following text with examples of both *kiddush hashem* and *hillul hashem*.

RE-IMAGINE Professional

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Abaye explained: As it was taught: *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God*, (Deuteronomy 6:5) i.e., that the Name of Heaven be beloved because of you. If someone studies Scripture and Mishnah, and attends on the disciples of the wise, is honest in business, and speaks pleasantly to persons, what do people then say concerning him? “Happy the father who taught him Torah, happy the teacher who taught him Torah; woe unto people who have not studied the Torah; for this man has studied the Torah look how fine his ways are, how righteous his deeds! Of him does Scripture say: *And He said unto me: Thou art My servant, Israel, in, whom I will be glorified.* (Isaiah 49:3)” But if someone studies Scripture and Mishnah, attends on the disciples of the wise, but is dishonest in business, and discourteous in his relations with people, what do people say about him? “Woe unto him who studied the Torah, woe unto his father who taught him Torah; woe unto his teacher who taught him Torah! This man studied the Torah: Look, how corrupt are his deeds, how ugly his ways; of him Scripture says: In that men said of them,: *These are the people of the Lord, and are gone forth out of His land.*”(Ezekiel 36:20)

אביי אמר: כדתניא, (דברים ו) ואהבת את ה' אלהיך - שיהא שם שמים מתאהב על ידך, שיהא קורא ושונה ומשמש תלמידי חכמים, ויהא משאו ומתנו בנחת עם הבריות, מה הבריות אומרות עליו - אשרי אביו שלמדו תורה, אשרי רבו שלמדו תורה. אוי להם לבריות שלא למדו תורה, פלוני שלמדו תורה - ראו כמה נאים דרכיו, כמה מתוקנים מעשיו, עליו הכתוב אומר (ישעיהו מט) ויאמר לי עבדי אתה ישראל אשר בכך אתפאר. אבל מי שקורא ושונה ומשמש תלמידי חכמים ואין משאו ומתנו באמונה, ואין דבורו בנחת עם הבריות, מה הבריות אומרות עליו - אוי לו לפלוני שלמד תורה, אוי לו לאביו שלמדו תורה, אוי לו לרבו שלמדו תורה, פלוני שלמד תורה - ראו כמה מקולקלין מעשיו וכמה מכוערין דרכין ועליו הכתוב אומר (יחזקאל לו)

Talmud, Yoma 86a

6. How does this text make a connection between observable behaviors and the principles of *kiddush hashem* and *hillul hashem*?
7. Share a contemporary, well-known example of *kiddush hashem* or *hillul hashem*?
8. If you wanted to be more aware in your own behavior, not only what you are doing but what values or principles it expresses, what could you do (or what have you done in the past)?
9. What steps could you take to understand the principles or values underlying someone else's actions?

 **Professional**

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