

Through the eyes of the Talmud Yerushalmi

Talmud Yerushalmi Institute

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Kiddush Hashem in the Talmud Yerushalmi

Kiddush Hashem, sanctifying God's name, specifically before a gentile is something we popularly practice by conducting ourselves in a way that will not fuel the gentile's prejudices. All too often, Kiddush Hashem is not even about the gentile at all. We use it to hold *ourselves* to proper conduct, the gentile being a stand-in for our own conscience. We'll tell our children to be on their best behavior in a mall to make a Kiddush Hashem when it is really good behavior that we want and not the Kiddush Hashem itself.

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Bava Metzi'ah 2:5) impresses upon us that performing Kiddush Hashem is in fact imperative and possibly even compulsory, outweighing even the Halakhah. It tells us stories of great Sages that went to extreme lengths in order to sanctify God's name before a gentile.

Rabbi Shimon Ben Shetach orders his students to return a jewel to a gentile even though by Jewish Law they were entitled to keep it. Let us add that the gentile was apparently an idol worshipper and a thief, yet no gentile is too lowly or corrupt to invoke the effect of Kiddush Hashem. How important it was for Rabbi Shimon Ben Shetach to hear a gentile exclaim the great the words "Blessed is the Merciful the God of the Jews"!

Nothing deterred the Rabbis from sanctifying God's name. Even when dealing with an enemy such as the Romans or when the gentile exhonored the Jew -- where moral and ethical argument could be made not to return the object, still, for the Rabbis, sanctifying God's name was of paramount importance!

The Talmud Yerushalmi teaches us of the imperative nature of Kiddush Hashem, so imperative in fact, that the Rabbis even risked their own lives to make it happen. In their mind, Kiddush Hashem must be impactful, persistent and even heroic. May we hear more gentiles proclaim the greatness of our Master! (Adapted from Rabbi Y.G. Bechhofer's lecture: Kiddush Hashem : www.talmudyerushalmi.org/lectures)

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