

# JEWISH ACTION SYMPOSIUM

**I**n relating to "the forgotten theme" of the Torah's universalism, of the inter-relationship between *K'lal Yisrael* and the nations of the world, should we as a Torah community follow the traditional approach of internal improvement and thereby serve as an exemplary model to others? Or should we develop "our own approaches to contemporary problems based on our world view and value system" and "press our Weltanschauung directly" on our non-Jewish neighbors? This is the basic question formulated by the editors of *Jewish Action* for the respondents of this Symposium to answer. My own opinion embraces neither alternative completely, but rather an intermediate option.

The second, less traditional, alternative mentioned above raises some questions. Many "approaches to contemporary problems based on our world view and value system" are already well-known without our pressing them. The trend toward acceptance of euthanasia, for example, is growing despite the clear understanding that it violates what the non-Jewish world calls the "Judeo-Christian ethic," which teaches the special sanctity of human life which God alone gives and may take. Other examples of this kind are our obligations toward the poor, human rights, and other similar issues.

On the other hand, "developing our own approaches to contemporary problems" seems to imply the creative formulation of Torah values to deal specifically with larger political and economic issues not really addressed by the received *halachic* categories of the Oral Torah — a kind of creative *legislation*, in contrast to the classic, Orthodox process of rigorous, *halachic* definition of the received categories. Should this inference be correct, the issue is not merely one of strategy, i.e., the traditional, internal approach versus that of external, direct impact, but rather one of fundamentals, i.e., the traditional, classic *halachic* process of Orthodoxy versus the innovative legislation of the non-Orthodox and the neo-Orthodox.

All this was the subject of a published debate about twenty-five years ago between the writer and an "Orthodox" modernist. This issue still divides us.

Of course, there is an area of general "*hashkafah*"-values, which are the domain of the *Aggadah*, that may properly be developed and applied to contemporary international problems. But such views would have the value only of editorial opinion.

## KIDDUSH HASHEM AND INDIFFERENT ISOLATION

By Rabbi Shelomoh E. Danziger

Moreover, the external approach of advising or interacting with the non-Jewish society assumes a Jewish cultural and political strength vis-à-vis the gentile society that does not exist in fact. The historic disdain of Jews and Judaism, exacerbated by disaffection with the State of Israel and its policies, does not produce an inclination to seriously consider Jewish approaches to world problems. On the contrary, pressing our Weltanschauung would be resented as the stereotypical *chutzpah* of a numerically insignificant group meddling in the problems of the dominant non-Jewish society. The Chief Rabbi's influence on Prime Minister Thatcher is the exception to the rule, and is the result of very special *political* circumstances. It would seem that those who strive to "press our Weltanschauung directly by developing our own approaches to contemporary problems based on our world view and value system" are pursuing a variety of unstated

agendas.

However, the alternative need not, and should not, be, a return to the "traditional" (sic) approach of "doing our own thing" with complete indifference to the non-Jewish community. This was indeed the unavoidable course of the ghetto in the past. It remains the path of those who are intent on recreating the idealized ghetto and the overromanticized "glories" of the *shtetl* and the attendant narrow horizon that was forced upon our ancestors. The exposure wrought by modern communications and the news media in an open society requires greater sensitivity to the implications of *Kiddush Hashem* and *Hillul Hashem* in relation to the non-Jewish public.

It is true that *halachically* the law of *Kiddush Hashem* applies only in relation to fellow-Jews, as the Torah states: "And ye shall not profane My Holy Name, but I shall be sanctified in the midst of the children of Israel" (Leviticus 22:32). But this means that the *specific halachah* to suffer martyrdom in the face of public *religious* coercion applies only to a Jewish public of at least ten Jews (*Sanhedrin* 74b; Rambam, *Yesode HaTorah* 5:2). However, *Kiddush Hashem* and *Hillul Hashem* in general certainly apply also to our relations with non-Jews, as is clear from various *pesukim* and *halachoth*.

Thus, the well-known passage in Rambam, *Yesode HaTorah* 5:11, which is the quintessential description of *Hillul Hashem* and *Kiddush Hashem*, ends with the statement: "—so that (because of his actions) all praise him, love him



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and desire to imitate his behavior, such a person has sanctified the Divine Name, and of such a person it is written: 'And He said unto me: 'Thou art My servant, Israel, through whom I will be glorified'" (*Isaiah* 49:3). It is clear from the context, especially from the following verses ("I will also give thee for a light of the nations"-verse 6), that the Divine Name is to be glorified through *Israel*, in relation to the gentiles. See also *Ezekiel* 36:16-27.

As for *halachoth* that are based on *Kiddush Hashem* and *Hillul Hashem* in our relation to non-Jews, see, for example, Rambam, *Gezeleh Va'avedah* 11:3; *Baba Metzia* 87b, Tosafoth s.v. *ella*; *Yoreh Deah* 232:14; *Yoma* 84 a; *Gittin* 46a; *Sanhedrin* 26b, Rashi s.v. *ochelei*, and elsewhere.

As a matter of fact, in the Torah itself we find concern for gentile perception of the laws of the Torah and the People of the Torah: "Observe therefore and do them (i.e., the laws of the Torah) for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the nations, who will hear all these statutes and will say: 'Surely a wise and understanding people is this great nation'" (*Deuteronomy* 4:6).

When the Torah is properly understood by us and carried out with the spiritual dignity and good taste befitting the Divine commands, there must be a positive impact on the nations, who sooner or later "will hear all these statutes" and come to learn about them without our *direct* effort to inform them.

This is especially true today. We can no longer afford the luxury of going our own way in indifferent isolation. To the Tanna's words (*Avoth* 2:1) that "all your deeds are recorded in the Book," we may add: "and in the news media, and on the radio talk shows, etc. Even in the earlier generations of isolation the undignified behavior in our "schuls" became known to the gentiles, which caused anguish to our *Gedolim* (see Laws of the *Beth Hakknesseth* 151, *Mishnah Berurah* 2). Today there is even more scrutiny of Jewish practice, and, through the publication of Torah books in English, greater awareness of our religious views, with greater possibilities for *Kiddush Hashem* or Heaven forbid, *Hillul Hashem*.

Thus, Rambam writes in his *Mishnah Commentary* (*Sanhedrin* 10:1): "By Heaven, this group (i.e., which takes strange *Aggadot* literally, without any explanation) destroys the glory of the Torah and dims its luster, and does to the Torah the opposite of what was intended through it. For Hashem said of the wisdom of His Torah '[the nations] who will hear all these statutes [will say: Surely a wise and understanding people is this great nation]'. This group, [however], teaches on the basis of the literal words of the Sages things, which if heard by the gentiles, would cause them to say: 'Surely a foolish and unworthy people is this insignificant nation.'" What was intended for *Kiddush Hashem* can easily be turned into the opposite.

As Orthodox Jews we are very visible. We instinctively act with more restraint, more dignity, more courtesy and refinement when we are in the presence of non-Jews. The

point being made here is that today *we are always in the presence of our gentile neighbors*. Even as we strive to improve ourselves internally as individuals within a Torah community, we must be aware that we do so as "Israel Among the Nations." And we do so *not* primarily to impress the nations, but because this is part of our striving for Torah excellence, as is obvious from the passage of *Deuteronomy* quoted above.

Some time ago Professor Aaron Twerski wrote: "I can only hope that the readers of the *Times* article — understand that while we 'right wingers' do not embrace Western culture, neither do we ignore it in the manner of know-nothings and country bumpkins." There is the implication that to be perceived as "know-nothings and country bumpkins" would not engender a *Kiddush Hashem*. I agree. But to avoid such a negative perception we who represent the Torah to the world must not be "inarticulate in three languages," as one wit put it, nor functionally illiterate with regard to general information and the general cultural heritage. Our dress and our grooming should be respectable, not forbidding, and our manners should reflect the refinement to be expected of those who are immersed in Torah study. In the words of Rav S. R. Hirsch: "Therefore, Jews, too, are to attach themselves to and love all good and true culture, and by the ways and manner of their behavior and demeanor appear as educated people, and show that being a Jew is only a *higher* stage of being a man" (Commentary to *Genesis* 3:24).

Most importantly, however, our religious acts must not be perceived as a *casual* exercise in Jewish *ethnicity*, which is too often the case. To have a *Kiddush Hashem* impact they must reflect an inner spirituality, not to be confused with external fervor and frenetic activity.

Let us conclude with the *Kiddush-Hashem*-engendering habitual saying of Abbayi (*Berachoth* 17a): "One should always be astute in his religious practice: he should answer softly, turning away wrath (v. *Proverbs* 15:1); foster peace with his brothers, with his relatives, and with all men, including a gentile in the street, so that he will be beloved above and desirable here below, and be well-liked by his fellow creatures; it was said of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai that no man ever greeted him first, even a gentile in the street."

Through *this* kind of internal improvement we may hope to be instrumental in the Divine purpose taught by our Sages (*Pesachim* 87b): "The Holy One, Blessed be He, did not exile Israel to live among the nations but so that *gerim* (proselytes) be joined unto them."

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