



Bet Horaah

בית הוראה

Shaarei Ezra

עברי עזרא

Parshat Bo
Zmanim for New York:
Candle Lighting: 4:54pm
Shabbat ends: 5:57pm
R"T 6:27pm

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THE SANCTITY OF GENTILE ACTS: ANALYSIS OF WHEN KINDNESS ALIGNS WITH HOLINESS
 WRITTEN BY **RABBI SHAY TAHAN**
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Since the inauguration of President Trump, we have witnessed numerous pro-Jewish and pro-Israel initiatives from his administration. Among these, President-elect Trump announced the appointment of Elise Stefanik as the United States ambassador to the United Nations. During her confirmation hearing, Stefanik firmly expressed her agreement with the views of far-right Israeli leaders, regarding Israel's "biblical right to the entire West Bank."

Stefanik previously distinguished herself by drawing global attention to alleged misconduct by presidents of top universities in the United States. In a widely viewed and impactful hearing, she questioned leaders from Harvard, MIT, and the University of Pennsylvania about alleged anti-Semitism on their campuses. Her forceful and incisive questioning led to the resignation of two of these university presidents and marked the exchange as one of the most-watched hearings in history. This exchange also likely influenced President Trump to sign a bill facilitating the deportation of Hamas supporters on campuses.

Such actions by President Trump, Mrs. Stefanik, and others in the newly formed government have significantly enhanced the reputation of the Jewish people. This raises an intriguing question within Jewish thought: can actions by non-Jews that promote Jewish honor and values be considered a Kiddush Hashem-sanctifying G-d?

The difference (*nafka mina*) lies in how we should view their actions: Should we merely appreciate their support and express *hakarot hatov* (gratitude) as a personal favor they did for us, or should we elevate their act by considering it a divine act connected to Hashem?

The question should be divided into two parts: First, is a non-Jew obligated to perform Kiddush Hashem? Secondly, if they are not obligated, can such an act still be considered Kiddush Hashem, and will they

receive great reward from heaven for it?

Is a non-Jew obligated to perform Kiddush Hashem?

This is actually a dilemma that our sages already discussed in the Gemara (Sanhedrin 74b) and debated over. Rabbi Ami was asked whether a gentile is obligated to sanctify Hashem. Abaye answered in the negative, proving his position by stating that gentiles are commanded in only seven mitzvot (Commonly known as the Seven Noahide Laws), and Kiddush Hashem is not one of them. However, Rava argued otherwise, explaining that the seven Noahide laws are intended to be fulfilled in a manner that ele-



vates Hashem's name, even if it requires giving up one's life to uphold them. For example, a gentile is commanded not to kill, and if given the choice to kill or be killed, they are obligated, according to Rava, to allow themselves to be killed to sanctify Hashem's name.

The Gemara concludes that a gentile is not obligated to give their life for the sake of Kiddush Hashem.

Abaye proves that a gentile is not commanded to sacrifice their life to avoid idolatry from the story of Naaman, the commander of the Aramean army. Naaman explained to Elisha that he was compelled to bow before an idol out of fear of his king. Elisha did not rebuke him and instead offered words of reassurance, indicating that while a gentile is commanded not to bow to idols, they are not required to give up their life to avoid it.

Therefore, the answer to our first question—whether they are commanded to do so—should be no. However, if a gentile does choose to act in such a manner, would it be considered Kiddush Hashem, or merely a commendable and kind act of support?

Is a godly act performed by a non-Jew considered Kiddush Hashem?

To explore this, we can examine examples of

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good deeds by non-Jews in our sources and analyze how Chazal perceived and interpreted such actions.

Let us begin with the profound words of Chazal, who teach that Kiddush Hashem can even be accomplished through animals. Chazal point out that the frogs in Mitzrayim were not commanded to perform Kiddush Hashem, yet they willingly jumped into the furnace to sanctify Hashem's Name: **"What did Chananiah, Mishael, and Azariah see that inspired them to give their lives for the sanctification of Hashem's Name by entering the fiery furnace? They reasoned a kal vachomer (logical inference) from the frogs: If the frogs, which are not commanded to sanctify Hashem's Name, jumped into the hot furnace [In order to perform Kiddush Hashem], then we, who are commanded to sanctify His Name, all the more so!"** (Pesachim 53b).

We derive two clear conclusions from this: First, *Kiddush Hashem* is not exclusive to the Jewish nation. Secondly, there is a clear distinction between Jews, who are obligated in *Kiddush Hashem*, and others who are not; yet, if they perform such acts, they are still considered as contributing to *Kiddush Hashem*.

Rav Asher Weiss shlita explained that although the commandment of Kiddush Hashem was given specifically to the Jewish people, the entire creation is inherently meant to sanctify Hashem's Name. Therefore, even the frogs participated in this sanctification.

The incident involving Nebuchadnezzar

Another example is a story of the three steps taken by Nebuchadnezzar to honor Hashem is recounted as the Talmud (Sanhedrin 96a and Yalkut Shimoni, melachim b, 244). When King Hezekiah fell ill and subsequently recovered, Hashem performed a miracle by restoring ten hours of daylight. Witnessing this miraculous event, Nebuchadnezzar sought to honor Hashem and wrote a letter to King Hezekiah, expressing his awe and praise for Hashem. After giving the letter to the messenger, Nebuchadnezzar reconsidered and decided to rewrite it in a manner that showed even greater respect for Hashem. To retrieve the messenger, he rose from his throne and took three steps toward him. These steps were an expression of his desire to proclaim Hashem's greatness and honor Him more appropriately.

Because of these three steps, Nebuchadnezzar was rewarded with an empire that spanned the known world. This story emphasizes that even the actions of a wicked person like Nebuchadnezzar,

when performed to honor Hashem, are significant and do not go unnoticed.

The incident involving Ketia bar Shalom

The story of Ketia bar Shalom is a powerful tale of courage and self-sacrifice, found in the Talmud (Avodah Zarah 10b). Ketia bar Shalom was a gentile Roman nobleman and adviser to the emperor, known for his wisdom and integrity.

One day, the emperor sought to enact a decree to annihilate the Jewish people. As was customary, the emperor consulted with his advisers, and they unanimously supported the decree. Ketia bar Shalom, however, courageously opposed it. He argued that such a plan was flawed and would ultimately harm the empire, stating that the Jewish people, despite their exile and small numbers, were not a threat and that destroying them would bring no benefit. His eloquent reasoning and defense of the Jewish people highlighted their unique role in the world and demonstrated the futility of such a decree.

The emperor was initially swayed by Ketia's argument but became enraged at his audacity to challenge him publicly. The emperor decreed that Ketia bar Shalom should be executed for his defiance. As Ketia was being led to his execution, he performed an act of circumcision to join his newfound faith.

A heavenly voice (bat kol) proclaimed that Ketia bar Shalom had merited eternal life in the World to come, despite having embraced Judaism only moments before his death. This story illustrates the power of repentance, the value of defending truth and justice, and the potential for even a single moment of sincerity to transform one's destiny. Although he died as a Jew, his greatness, which merited him a place in the World to come, was a result of his act of Kiddush Hashem and his role in saving the Jewish community while he was still a gentile.

Conclusion:

These are just a few examples of how a non-Jew can achieve the greatest *mitzva* and fulfill the highest purpose in the world: recognizing and honoring Hashem and His people, thereby sanctifying His name. As the *pasuk* states: "כל הנקרא בשמי ולכבודי בראתיו, יצרתיו" — "Everyone who is called by My name, whom I have created for My glory, I have formed them, and I have made them" (Yeshayah 43:7).

MORE THAN A PHARAOH: THE CLASH OF HUMAN DESIRE AND DIVINE POWER

As we read through our *parashot* describing Moshe Rabbeinu's interactions with Pharaoh, one thing stands out: Pharaoh tries hard to portray himself as a god who created the world. For example, when Moshe needs to speak to him, Hashem tells him he will find Pharaoh at the river. This is because Pharaoh goes there to relieve himself in secret, avoiding the palace bathroom so that people won't see him and realize he isn't a god.



Pharaoh is quoted as saying, "The Nile is mine, and I have made it."

This reflects his claim of divine control over nature and the sustenance of Egypt, as the Nile was central to their survival (Shemot Raba 8, 2).

But this is quite troubling: Why would Pharaoh feel the need to portray himself as a god? Pharaoh was the leader of the world's greatest empire at the time and the most powerful man on the globe. He had everyone bowing

down to him, and every wish of his was immediately fulfilled.

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With such absolute power and control, one might wonder why he would go to such lengths to convince others of his divinity. What more could he possibly want to gain when he already had everything?

The answer lies in the nature of human beings. By definition, humans are never truly satisfied. Hashem created us with an innate need and desire to always accomplish more. As Chazal say, "A person who has 100 seeks 200, and once he has those 200, he wants 400."

This perpetual striving for more drives people to set new goals, conquer new territories, and surpass their previous accomplishments. It's a fundamental part of what it means to be human: an inherent dissatisfaction with the present and an unrelenting urge to reach beyond it.

We can see this in today's world powers as well. President Trump sought to annex Canada and buy Greenland; Putin aims to reclaim Ukraine; and Erdogan aspires to revive the caliphate, starting with Syria and expanding throughout the Middle East.

The same was true for Pharaoh. He wasn't content with being the world's most powerful ruler; he sought to take over Hashem's

power, as He was the only one above him. Pharaoh's desire to elevate himself to the level of the divine was not just an ego trip, but a reflection of the intrinsic drive for humans to reach beyond their natural limits. Pharaoh already had everything a man could desire—wealth, control, and influence—but that was still not enough. What Pharaoh failed to recognize is that a true god has no desires and needs no further conquest. His power is complete in itself; He does not seek to surpass Himself. Pharaoh's longing to be more than human—more than a king—ironically proves that he was only human, as true divinity is beyond such yearning.

But there is also a message here for us. We can learn that while we are human and naturally seek to accomplish more, we have the ability to elevate ourselves spiritually by redirecting our desires. Instead of pursuing physical wants and material gain, we can shift our focus to spiritual growth. For example, rather than striving to accumulate more money, we can aim to achieve deeper learning and a better understanding of Torah. This shift in our desires allows us to move closer to becoming more godly in our actions and intentions.

REVENGE AS JUSTICE AND HEALING: LESSONS FROM THE PAST AND PRESENT

The pasuk at the beginning of Parashat Bo says that Hashem will abuse the Egyptians so we can speak about it in the "ears" of our children: "Go to Pharaoh: For I have hardened his heart and the hearts of his courtiers, in order that I may display My signs among them, and that you may recount in the ears of your child and of your child's child how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I displayed My signs among them." An obvious question is why the Torah emphasizes the ears; it should have simply said, "so you should recount to your children," without mentioning the ears.

To possibly answer this, we should look back at the event with Pharaoh's dreams. Rashi (Bereshit 41; 8) explains that Pharaoh asked his advisors to interpret them, and while they attempted to do so, their interpretations did not "enter his ears" because he did not find them satisfying or pleasurable. From Rashi, we learn that the Torah's definition of something "entering the ear" implies satisfaction and pleasure.

Thus, the pasuk in our parasha means that Hashem will take revenge on the Egyptians in a manner that will bring us satisfaction and pleasure. However, this is complex—why would we feel pleasure from the suffering of our enemy?

Before answering this, let us revisit the laws of revenge. Although the Torah commands us not to seek revenge, as it states, "*Lo tikom*" (לא תקום), meaning "you shall not take vengeance" (Vayikra 19:18), this prohibition applies to interpersonal relationships within our nation. However, when someone commits a crime, such as the terrorists in Gaza, we are, on the contrary, commanded to seek vengeance. There are verses in *Tehillim* that express this sentiment of seeking retribution, such as:

(*Tehillim* 79:10): "לָמָּה יִאֲמְרוּ הַגּוֹיִם אֵינָהּ אֱלֹהִים יִדְעוּ בְּגוֹיִם לְעֵינֵינוּ"

“נִקְמַת דָּם עֲבָדֶיךָ הַשְּׂפוּרָה” — “Why should the nations say, 'Where is their G-d?' Let it be known among the nations, before our eyes, the avenging of the spilled blood of Your servants.”

Or (*Tehillim* 58:11): “יִשְׂמַח צְדִיק בִּי הֲזָה נִקָּם” — “The righteous will rejoice when they see vengeance.”



Before entering the Holy Land, Hashem commanded Moshe to exact vengeance upon Midyan for causing the Jewish men to sin with their women, which led to the plague that killed 24,000 Jews. Hashem first instructed them to treat Midyan as an enemy and then commanded Moshe to seek revenge, as it says (*Bamidbar* 31:2): “נִקֹּם נִקְמַת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵאֵת הַמִּדְיָנִים” — “Exact the vengeance of the children of Israel upon the Midianites.”

Another example comes from the tradition recorded by our sages (*Sotah* 13a), where Chushim, the son of Dan, avenged his grandfather Yaakov's honor by killing Eisav. Upon hearing this, Yaakov Avinu smiled and felt a sense of satisfaction for this act of revenge.

This raises the question we asked before: why would the Torah advocate for revenge instead of encouraging forgiveness and forbearance? There are two basic reasons why revenge is important. One is that revenge is sometimes seen not as a personal vendetta but as a righteous act that upholds and restores justice. Meaning, when an aggressor is punished harshly, it demonstrates that there is justice in the world and that vicious crimes do not go unpunished. Secondly, when a person is a victim of a crime, part of their healing process is experiencing the punishment of the criminal. The victim needs this act of revenge for their well-being and to recover as much as possible. Without it, they carry their pain for a long time, unable to fully heal.

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For these reasons, it's possible that Hashem said He is punishing what they deserve, such as the destruction in Gaza or explosions the Egyptians so we can see and derive satisfaction from it. We in Lebanon, we can, and should, feel a sense of satisfaction from can draw the same lesson from the events that have unfolded in the revenge we need so much. Israel and abroad with our sworn enemies. When they receive

הנמצא באוטובוס או בטיסה והגיע זמן תפלה

ויתפלל שמונה עשרה בעמידה, ואם אינו יכול, וכגון שנמצא ואם מתפלל בישיבה יכוון את רגליו זו בצד זו כמו כשהוא עושה כשמתפלל בעמידה (משנ"ב סימן צה סק"ב).

ולגבי חזרת התפלה אחר שהגיע למקום שיכול להתפלל בעמידה, דעת הרב משה פינשטיין (אגר"מ או"ח ח"ד סימן כ) שהמתפלל בישיבה באירון אינו צריך לחזור ולהתפלל. ואף לכתחילה אם קשה לו העמידה באירון ויגרום לו טירדה עדיף לישב. והגאון הרב בן ציון אבא שאול (אור לציון ח"ב עמוד רצב) סבר שיחזור להתפלל שנית בתורת נדבה, ויאמר אם חייב אני בתפלה יהא לשם חובה, ואם לאו תהא תפילתי לשם נדבה. ואין צריך לחדש דבר בתפלה.



הנמצא באוטובוס או בטיסה והגיע זמן תפלה, אם יוכל יעצור ויתפלל שמונה עשרה בעמידה, ואם אינו יכול, וכגון שנמצא בכלי תחבורה ציבורי, או אפילו אם נוסע ברכבו והעצירה תגרום לו עיכוב שמטריד את כוונתו בתפלה, יתפלל בישיבה תוך כדי נסיעה, ויכוון רגליו שיהיו סמוכות זו לזו, ואם יוכל יעמוד לכרוע במקומות הכריעה. וכשיגיע למקום מושבו אם ירצה יוכל לחזור ולהתפלל שוב בעמידה בתורת נדבה. ואסור לנהג להתפלל בתוך כדי נסיעה מחמת הסכנה.

ואם התפלל בישיבה ואחר כך הגיע למקום שיכול לחזור להתפלל שנית בעמידה לפני שיעבור זמן התפילה, כתב השולחן ערוך (ס"ט) שיתפלל שנית. והמשנ"ב (ס"ק כז) כתב שהסכימו האחרונים שאין צריך לחזור ולהתפלל שנית, ומכל מקום אם רוצה יכול להתפלל שנית בתורת נדבה, ואין צריך לחדש בה דבר, דזה שמתפלל עתה בעמידה הוא כחידוש. וכן העלה גם בספר הלכה ברורה (ס"ק טז).

בשולחן ערוך איתא (סימן צד ס"ה): היה יושב בספינה או בעגלה, אם יכול לעמוד במקום הכריעות עומד כדי שיהא כורע מעומד ופוסע ג' פסיעות. והרמ"א הגיה שאף על פי שיושב בכל התפלה, מכל מקום אם אפשר לו לעמוד יעמוד כדי לקיים הכריעות והפסיעות כדרך. ולכן אף שלכתחילה ודאי ישתדל לעמוד בתפלת שמונה עשרה, אבל אם אינו יכול לעמוד וחושש שמא יעבור זמן תפלה רשאי להתפלל בישיבה.

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