

Kiddush Hashem, Chillul Hashem, and Medinat Yisrael

A Shiur Commemorating Rav Yehuda Amital's Tenth Yahrtzeit

כ"ז תמוז, ה'תש"פ – July 19, 2020
Shlomo Zuckier

1. Harav Yehuda Amital, "A Kaddish for the Martyrs of the Holocaust," VBM

A generation ago, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel declared that the Fast of the Tenth of Tevet, which marks the beginning of the destruction of the Temple, would also be observed as a Holocaust Remembrance Day. Specifically, it would be the day to recite *kaddish* for relatives whose exact date of death we do not know. Just as the Tenth of Tevet thus has acquired a dual significance, so does the *kaddish* itself that we recite on this day.

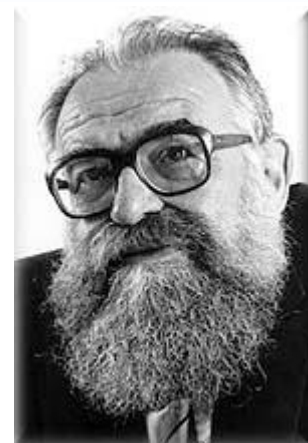
On the one hand, *kaddish* is recited by each individual for his relatives. On the other hand, when many individuals recite *kaddish*, when the whole congregation recites *kaddish*, then it assumes additional meaning. To the extent that we explore this additional meaning of the communal *kaddish*, the *kaddish* of each individual will be elevated higher and higher, until the *kaddish* of each individual will itself attain a power and depth that never existed in the *kaddish* prayer as recited in past generations.

At the time of death of every individual Jew, the Holy One's great Name is diminished, as it were, and so we add to it by reciting *kaddish*. This may be said of the *kaddish* of the individual.

But the communal *kaddish* is the innermost and most authentic expression of the Jewish nation. It demonstrates our faith's attitude towards everything that is bound up with the word "Holocaust" – a word that is only a code for all that took place there. Since there is no word or sentence or article or book that could describe what happened, we use this code word: Holocaust.

By reciting *kaddish* as a congregation, the Jewish nation expresses its feelings towards the Holy One in the wake of the Holocaust. Our religious attitude towards the Holocaust revolves around two axes, both of which find expression in our religious literature...

This is the inner significance of the communal *kaddish*, and this is also what gives significance to the *kaddish* of each individual. A *kaddish* such as that which we recite on Holocaust Remembrance Day has never been heard in such depth in all of Jewish history – a *kaddish* that expresses this great faith. "The Rock Whose work is perfect," together with "Your eyes are too pure to see evil." This is what gives the strength, the power, the depth to the *kaddish* of each individual.



2. Harav Yehuda Amital, "Desecration of God's Name Committed by the State," VBM

HaRav Amital delivered this *shiur* during Chanuka of 5768. This version was not reviewed by HaRav Amital.
THE DESECRATION AND THE SANCTIFICATION OF GOD'S NAME

A famous talmudic passage in *Yoma* 86a asserts that the most severe transgression is the desecration of God's name:

But in the case of one who is guilty of the desecration of [God's] name, repentance does not suspend, Yom Kippur does not atone, and afflictions do not cleanse. Rather they all suspend, and death cleanses – "And it was revealed in my ears, by the Lord of hosts; Surely this iniquity shall not be forgiven you till you die." (*Yeshayahu* 22:14).

תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף פו עמוד א
אבל מי שיש חילול השם בידו - אין לו כח
בתשובה לתלות, ולא ביום הכפורים לכפר,
ולא ביסוריין למרק. אלא כולן תולין, ומיתה
ממרקת, שנאמר ונגלה באזני ה' צבאות אם
יכפר העון הזה לכם עד תמותון.

This passage, however, is dealing with the desecration of God's name committed by an individual. Without a doubt, the desecration of God's name committed by the community or its representative – the king – is even more severe, as is described in Scripture. (*II Shmuel* 21:1-9):...

King David kills seven of Shaul's sons in order to atone for Shaul's breaking of the covenant that had been made with the Giv'onim!

The Gemara in *Yevamot* 79a has a difficulty with David's handing over Shaul's sons to the Giv'onim:

<p>But, surely, it is written: "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children etc." Rabbi Chiyya bar Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yochanan: It is better that a letter be rooted out of the Torah than that the Divine name shall be publicly desecrated.</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת יבמות דף עט עמוד א מתיב רב חנא בר קטינא: ויחמול המלך על מפרכות בן יהונתן בן שאול! שלא העבירו. וכי משוא פנים יש בדבר? אלא שהעבירו וקלטו, ובקש עליו רחמים ופלטו. ואכתי משוא פנים יש בדבר! אלא שבקש רחמים שלא יקלטנו הארון. והא כתיב: לא יומתו אבות על בנים וגו'! אמר רבי חייא בר אבא אמר רבי יוחנן: מוטב שתעקר אות אחת מן התורה ואל יתחלל שם שמים בפרהסיא.</p>
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We see then that in order to atone for a desecration of God's name committed by the king of Israel, it is even permissible to root out a letter of the Torah!...

The prophet Yechezkel also speaks of the importance of avoiding any desecration of God's name:

<p>Therefore say unto the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations, whither you came. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in the midst of them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes. (<i>Yechezkel</i> 36:22-23)</p>	<p>יחזקאל פרק לו (כב) לָכֵן אֶמַר לְבֵית־יִשְׂרָאֵל כֹּה אָמַר אֲדֹנָי יְקֹוֹם לֹא לְמַעַנְכֶם אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי אִם־ לְשֵׁם־קְדוֹשִׁי אֲשֶׁר חִלַּלְתֶּם בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר־בְּאֶתֶם שָׁם: (כג) וְקִדַּשְׁתִּי אֶת־שְׁמִי הַגָּדוֹל הַמְחֻלָּל בְּגוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר חִלַּלְתֶּם בְּתוֹכָם וְיָדְעוּ הַגּוֹיִם כִּי־אֲנִי יְקֹוֹם נָאִם אֲדֹנָי יְקֹוֹם בְּהַקְדֹּשִׁי בְּכֶם לְעֵינֵיהֶם:</p>
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According to Yechezkel, God will redeem Israel in order to avoid the desecration of His name that would be caused if the exile continues. In the wake of this idea, I dare to say that we have merited the establishment of the State of Israel – something that our fathers did not merit – because of the terrible desecration of God's name during the period of the Holocaust. The establishment of the state and the sanctification of God's name that found expression in its wake atones in the smallest way for the terrible desecration of God's name caused by the killing of six million Jews during World War II.

DESECRATION OF GOD'S NAME AND BREAKING A COVENANT

Having seen the importance of the sanctification of God's name, and, *lehavdil*, the consequences of the desecration of God's name, let us now examine the Rambam's words on this issue (*Hilkhot Melakhim* 6:1-3):

<p>War is not waged against anybody in the world until a call of peace is extended to him, neither an elective war nor an obligatory war. As it is stated: "When you come near to a city to fight against it, then proclaim peace to it" (<i>Devarim</i> 20:10). If they made peace and accepted the seven commandments that the sons of Noach are commanded about, nobody is killed and they are tributaries. As it says: "They shall be tributaries to you, and they shall serve you" (ibid. v. 11)... It is forbidden to violate the treaty with them and to deceive them, after they have made peace and accepted the seven commandments.</p>	<p>רמב"ם הלכות מלכים פרק ו הלכה א אין עושין מלחמה עם אדם בעולם עד שקוראין לו שלום אחד מלחמת הרשות ואחד מלחמת מצוה, שנאמר כי תקרב אל עיר להלחם עליה וקראת אליה לשלום, אם השלימו וקבלו שבע מצות שנצטוו בני נח עליהן אין הורגין מהן נשמה והרי הן למס, שנאמר יהיו לך למס ועבדוך, ... הלכה ג ואסור לשקר בבריתם ולכזב להם אחר שהשלימו וקבלו שבע מצות. רדב"ז הלכות מלכים פרק ו הלכה ג [ג] ואסור לשקר וכו'. זה נלמד מענין הגבועונים כי יש בדבר זה חילול השם:</p>
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The Rambam teaches a novel law that after an enemy has made peace with Israel and accepted upon itself the seven Noachide laws, it is forbidden to violate a covenant that was made with them. The only commentator that I have found who relates to the source of the Rambam's ruling is the Radbaz (ad loc.), who explains that it is forbidden to violate such a treaty owing to the desecration of God's name that this would cause...

A question arises: what is the Rambam's source for his ruling that it is only forbidden to violate a covenant made with nations who made peace with us if they accepted the seven Noachide laws? If indeed it is

forbidden to break a treaty because of the desecration of God's name that this would cause – as the Radbaz explains – why does this principle only apply if the nations accepted upon themselves the seven Noachide laws?

In order to uncover the source for the Rambam's position, let us examine the story of the Giv'onim mentioned above, where Shaul is punished in the wake of his breaking the covenant that had been made with them.

WHY WASN'T THE COVENANT MADE WITH THE GIV'ONIM BROKEN?

The Gemara in *Gittin 46b* states that the covenant that Yehoshua had made with the Giv'onim could not be broken because it was a vow that was made publicly:

<p>Rabbi Yehuda says: If he divorces her for vows which she made publicly, he may not remarry her... Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the reason of Rabbi Yehuda [for holding that a vow made publicly may not be annulled]? Because Scripture says: "And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them."</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת גיטין דף מו עמוד א רבי יהודה אומר: כל נדר שידעו בו רבים - לא יחזיר, ושלא ידעו בו רבים - יחזיר. אמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: מ"ט דר' יהודה? דכתיב: ולא הכום בני ישראל כי נשבעו להם נשיאי העדה.</p>
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When we examine the verses themselves, we see that the vow under discussion was even more severe:

<p>But when the inhabitants of Giv'on heard what Yehoshua had done unto Jericho and to Ai, they also acted cunningly, and went and took provisions, and took old sacks upon their asses, and wine skins, worn and rent and patched up; and worn shoes and clouted upon their feet, and worn garments upon them; and all the bread of their provision was dry and was become crumbs. And they went to Yehoshua unto the camp at Gilgal, and said unto him, and to the men of Israel, We are come from a far country; now therefore make you a covenant with us... And Yehoshua made peace with them, and made a covenant with them, to let them live; and the princes of the congregation swore unto them. And it came to pass at the end of three days after they had made a covenant with them, that they heard that they were their neighbors, and that they dwelt among them... And the children of Israel smote them not, because the princes of the congregation had sworn unto them by the Lord, the God of Israel. And all the congregation murmured against the princes. But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the Lord, the God of Israel; now therefore we may not touch them... And Yehoshua made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the Lord, unto this day, in the place which He should choose. (<i>Yehoshua 9:3-27</i>)</p>	<p>יהושע פרק ט (יח) וְלֹא הַכּוּם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי־נִשְׁבְּעוּ לָהֶם נְשִׂיאי הָעֵדָה בִּיקָנָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּלְנוּ כָּל־ הָעֵדָה עֲלֵי־ הַנְּשִׂיאים: (יט) וַיֹּאמְרוּ כָּל־ הַנְּשִׂיאים אֶל־כָּל־ הָעֵדָה אַבְתָּנוּ נִשְׁבְּעוּנוּ לָהֶם בִּיקָנָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַתָּה לֹא נוּכַל לִגְזֹעַ בָּהֶם:</p>
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...if indeed we accept the *Tosafot's* second answer and say that when Yehoshua made a covenant with the Giv'onim, they were not yet interested in converting – from where then does the Rambam learn that it is only forbidden to break a covenant with the nations if they come to convert? Surely, Yehoshua did not violate the covenant that he had made with the Giv'onim, despite the fact that it was made well before they thought about conversion.

DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE – HALAKHIC OBLIGATION?

In my opinion, the Rambam's position is based on an important principle. According to him, it is permissible to break a covenant made with other nations as long as they have not yet paid a price for entering into the covenant. However, the moment those nations pay a certain price – breaking the covenant constitutes a desecration of God's name.

Accordingly, the Rambam does not mean to say that it is only forbidden to break a covenant made with another nation if it had accepted the seven Noachide laws. Rather, he means to bring an example of a price that non-Jewish nations can pay for entering into a covenant with Israel. The fact that a non-Jew agrees to observe the seven Noachide laws constitutes a certain price that he pays for making the covenant, and therefore in such a situation it is forbidden to desecrate God's name and break the covenant. However, even a different price that is paid for making the covenant can lead to the situation in which it is forbidden to break the covenant.

In other words, God's name is desecrated when we break a meaningful covenant, and acceptance of the seven Noachide laws indicates that the covenant is indeed meaningful and significant. In such a situation, then, it is forbidden to break the covenant.

Over twenty years ago, this idea led me to an important *chiddush*.

As we know, Israel's Declaration of Independence promises that the State of Israel will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, regardless of nationality, and even if they are not Jewish. In light of the explanation suggested here regarding the Rambam's ruling, I argued that since the Declaration of Independence is an important legal document, the obligations undertaken in it are of great importance. In other words, just as the acceptance of the seven Noachide laws gives force to a covenant, so too committing an obligation to writing in the Declaration of Independence gives it force. According to the Rambam, therefore, there is a halakhic obligation to fulfill the obligations undertaken in the Declaration of Independence – owing to the concern about the desecration of God's name...

My position was publicized, to the point that someone told me that Shimon Peres, who was then the Prime Minister, quoted me in one of his talks. *Lehavdil*, I was severely maligned in the Charedi press. The argument was raised there: If the state decides to write in the Declaration of Independence that all of its citizens must eat pork, will that too have halakhic validity? Of course, this objection is groundless. In this *shiur* I clearly explained what I meant; neither the Charedim nor Shimon Peres understood what I had said. It is not the Declaration of Independence that has halakhic validity. Rather it is the obligation found therein regarding non-Jews living in the State of Israel that has halakhic validity, owing to the desecration of God's name that would be caused if that obligation were not to be fulfilled!

Nevertheless, the fact that my words caused such a stir teaches us an important lesson. Even the secular community understands that when something has halakhic validity, it is meaningful and significant. Shimon Peres had high regard for the Declaration of Independence even before he heard what I had to say on the matter, but when he heard that I believe that the declaration also has halakhic validity, it rose even higher in his estimation.

3. Harav Yehuda Amital, "The Obligation to Sanctify God's Name," VBM

I. "THAT THE NAME OF HEAVEN SHALL BECOME BELOVED THROUGH YOU"

In the continuation of the passage (Yoma 86a), the Gemara defines what is meant by sanctification and desecration of God's name:

<p>As it was taught [in a <i>baraita</i>]: "You shall love the Lord your God" (<i>Devarim 6:5</i>) - that the name of Heaven shall become beloved through you. [This means] that one should read [Scripture], learn [Mishna], serve Torah scholars, and his dealings with people should be conducted in a pleasant manner. What do people say about him? "Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah; fortunate is his teacher who taught him Torah. Woe unto people who do not learn Torah. This person who learned Torah, see how pleasant are his ways, how refined are his deeds." Regarding him Scripture says: "He [God] said to me, You are My servant, Israel, through whom I am glorified" (<i>Yeshayahu 49:3</i>). But as for one who learns [Scripture], studies [Mishna] and serves Torah scholars, and but his business transactions are not conducted faithfully, and whose manner of speaking with people is not pleasant - what do people say about him? "Woes unto his father who taught him Torah; woe unto his teacher who taught him Torah. See how perverse are his deeds and how ugly are his ways." Regarding him Scripture says: "[They came among the nations... and they profaned My holy name] when it was said of them, These are the people of the Lord, but they departed His land" (<i>Yechezkel 36:20</i>).</p>	<p>תלמוד בבלי מסכת יומא דף פו עמ' א אביי אמר: כדתניא, 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 ויאמר לי עבדי אתה ישראל אשר בך 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 דרכיו! ועליו הכתוב אומר באמר להם עם ה' אלה ומארצו יצאו.</p>
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The name of God is desecrated when a person who studied Torah fails to relate to other people in a fitting manner. The sanctification of His name is just the opposite - when the name of Heaven becomes beloved through him. *Chazal* teach us that the name of Heaven becomes beloved not only through articles, debates, and

sermons, but first and foremost, through personal example that is moral and humane, and arouses a positive attitude on the part of the surrounding society. A special obligation falls upon those who study Torah to make the name of Heaven beloved to other people...

If it is generally true that a Torah scholar is obligated to cause God's name to become beloved, all the more so does this apply in a generation in which so many have abandoned the way of Torah and *mitzvot*. This is especially true in Israel, where the tension between the religious and non-religious worlds expresses itself in political contexts as well, and the media often present the negative aspects of the observant community. In our day, the best way to establish lines of communication with the non-religious is through conduct that sanctifies God's name. Debating the issues is usually ineffective, and the best way to draw people close to Torah is by way of personal example.

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook writes (*Eder ha-Yakar*, p. 37):

The denial [of God] on moral grounds always serves as the foundation for the denial [of God] that pretends to be scientific, which has no foundation of its own. Therefore, the more the faithful upholders of the Torah improve their traits and actions, so will moral denial diminish naturally...

According to Rabbi Kook, the denial of God always begins with the immoral conduct of people who claim to represent the faith. As a rule, the denial of God has spread across the world as a result of the criticism leveled against the faithful. Among the Jewish people as well, the denial of God always begins not with criticism of Him, but with criticism of the conduct of those who believe in Him. It is such criticism that causes the loss of faith.

It follows from this, argues Rabbi Kook, that the way to deal with the denial of God is through the sanctification of His name (*ibid.*, p. 43):

There should be no place whatsoever for this fraudulent denial to spread in the world... But it comes with moral objections raised against unfit conduct seen among people of Torah and faith...

The basic cause for all the confusion, which brings evil into the world by way of evil ideas, is the sin of desecrating God's name. Corresponding to it is the great power of the sanctification of God's name that issues forth from a Torah scholar who conducts his business dealings in a pleasant manner and speaks gently to others... For good and moral conduct, good actions and good traits issuing forth from righteous and God-fearing Torah scholars, constitute the best way to remove the mistaken foundation of moral denial.

II. THE SANCTIFICATION OF GOD'S NAME IN THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE STATE OF ISRAEL

As stated above, in discussing the desecration of God's name, the Gemara cites the verse, "And they profaned My holy name when it was said of them, These are the people of the Lord, but they departed His land" (*Yechezkel 36:20*). The verse is taken from a prophecy of rebuke aimed at those who had gone into exile and desecrated the name of God among the nations (verses 16-21):

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, when the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their way and their doings; their way was before Me as the uncleanness of a menstruating woman. So I poured My fury upon them for the blood that they had shed upon the land, and for their idols with which they had defiled it. And I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries: according to their way and according to their doings I judged them. And when they came to the nations, into which they came, they profaned My holy name, *when it was said of them, These are the people of the Lord, but they departed His land*. But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations, into which they came.

Rashi in his commentary to the *Yoma* passage explains:

<p>This is what Scripture calls a desecration of the name of God: when a distinguished person commits a transgression and calamity comes upon him, and all say, "What did [his piety] help him? See the pious and the wise, how evil comes upon them." As it is stated: "They profaned My holy name." How did they profane it? "When it was said of them" by the gentiles among whom they were exiled, "See,</p>	<p>רש"י מסכת יומא דף פו עמוד א באמור להם עם ה' אלה - את זו קרא הכתוב חילול השם, כשאדם חשוב עובר עבירה ופורענות באה עליו, והכל אומרים: מה הועילו לו, ראה החסידים והחכמים רעה באה עליהם, שנאמר ויחללו את שם קדשי ובמה חללוהו</p>
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these are the people of the Lord, and He could not save them from exile." Thus, the name of Heaven is desecrated and His glory is diminished.

באמור עליהם הנכרים שגלו ביניהן ראו עם ה' אלה ולא יכול להצילם שלא יגלו, נמצא שם שמים מתחלל וכבודו מתמעט.

We see, then, that Rashi views individual acts involving a desecration of God's name as part of the larger desecration of His name on a worldwide scale resulting from the fact that the Jewish people are in exile and God does not save them.^[2]

Rabbi Menachem Ziemba, *Hy"d*, Rabbi of Warsaw and author of *Totza'ot Chayim*, related to the Zionist movement and the establishment of a Jewish state in *Eretz Yisrael* in a speech delivered before the Great Assembly of Agudath Yisrael in 1937:

The question of *Eretz Yisrael* which is currently under discussion involves sanctification of God's name. There are various opinions, pro and con. Those who wish to see the speedy establishment of Jewish sovereignty are driven by a great yearning to sanctify the name of Heaven before the eyes of the nations, to show them that even after thousands of years have passed during which the Jewish people have wandered across the earth, they have not given up hope and they will yet live. (*Chiddushei Ha-GRMZ*, no. 54)

Rabbi Menachem Ziemba interprets the position of those who were ready to accept the partition of *Eretz Yisrael* as stemming from the desire to sanctify the name of Heaven in the eyes of the nations and counter their claim that God has forsaken the Jewish people. Rabbi Ziemba further argues that the position of those who oppose the establishment of a Jewish state is also based on the consideration of the sanctification of God's name. They, too, agree that the establishment of a Jewish state sanctifies God's name, but they maintain that it should be put off to a time when the sanctification of His name will be even greater:

Those who oppose [the establishment of a state], their intention is also to sanctify God's name... For the primary sanctification of God's name is when God is exalted and sanctified in the midst of the Jewish people. Therefore, they maintain that, while indeed the establishment of Jewish sovereignty at this time would be a sanctification of God's name in the eyes of the nations, it would be an even greater sanctification of God's name amidst the Jewish people if we would have the courage to throw away [the establishment of a state] and clearly show the Jewish people our strong confidence and true faith in the complete redemption accompanying the coming of the Messiah. This would illuminate the hearts [of the Jewish people] with one of the principles of our faith, namely, the belief in the coming of the Messiah, at which time God's name will be sanctified also for the nations.

As stated above, these words pronounced shortly before the Holocaust, which was the greatest desecration of God's name in all of history. All the more so are these words meaningful after the Holocaust. The fact that a calamity unparalleled in all of history befell, in Yechezkel's words, "the people of the Lord" constitutes a terrible desecration of God's name.

I believe that we merited a Jewish state only because of God's desire to sanctify His name in the aftermath of the terrible profanation of His name during the Holocaust. The establishment of the state and its victories in war against the Arab armies that rose up against it constitute a response involving the sanctification of God's name.

Precisely for this reason, the obligation to sanctify God's name has special significance in our time for those of us who live in the State of Israel, the entire establishment of which stemmed from the principle of sanctifying God's name. This is why on various occasions over the years I felt obligated to protest against instances of the desecration of God's name. This was the only cause for which I felt a need to speak out publicly.

The way to deal with the desecration of God's name is through the sanctification of His name, as described in the Gemara. This occurs on two levels. First, on the personal level, every individual, both while learning in yeshiva and afterwards, can act in a manner that sanctifies God's name. Second, on the national level: if the State of Israel can sanctify God's name if it is governed according to the principles of justice and morality.

4. Harav Yehuda Amital, “The Meaning of Redemption,” VBM

On the one hand, the people of Israel's taking possession of the Promised Land can be viewed as a normal and natural state, as part of the way of the world. Every nation has its own homeland, and so it should be true regarding the people of Israel as well. But the people of Israel do not stop at the natural level; rather, they strive for redemption in the religious sense of the word, an event the significance of which transcends the natural course of events. This event can only take place when the people of Israel reach the level of their forefathers, as stated by the Ramban.

It is possible that this goal will be achieved for only a short time, as was the case during the period of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness and during part of the First Temple period. But this dismal historical reality does not detract from the fact that this is the ideal aspiration that stands before our eyes.

Just as, according to the Ramban, the redemption could occur already at Mount Sinai, the physical presence of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel does not guarantee redemption. Many people said that when we came to Israel, we reached redemption. But the truth is that despite the importance of the land, redemption is not merely a matter of territory, as it is for the French or the Belgians. There is still a long road ahead of us, and we must not sit on our laurels.

5. By Harav Yehuda Amital, “The Religious Significance of the State of Israel,” VBM

This sicha was delivered on Chanuka 5757 (1996).

Two basic attitudes towards the religious significance of the State of Israel are prevalent within the contemporary Orthodox community in Israel. The *Charedi* (Ultra-Orthodox) position contends that we can grant no religious significance to the State, and some even view the State as a negative phenomenon. The second position is the “messianic” approach, which applies to the Jewish State all the epithets with which Rav Kook *zt”l* described the State well before its establishment: “The foundation of God’s Throne in the world, whose entire desire is that God shall be One and His Name shall be One.” I would like to propose a third position regarding this critical issue. Let us begin our analysis with a careful study of the writings of Rav Kook himself.

Secular Pioneers

Rav Avraham Yitzchak ha-Kohen Kook (1865-1935) lived in extraordinary times and witnessed the striking phenomenon of the Jewish people’s national renewal in their ancestral homeland...

process of the Return to Zion, a difficult and painful problem presented itself: those who brought about the process were not Torah observant. It would have been far simpler were the return to the land to have been accompanied by a return to the Torah. Unfortunately, though, this is not what happened. The major personalities of the Zionist movement abandoned, for the most part, the religious lifestyle, and thus the return to Israel involved a rebellion against Jewish tradition and a rejection of Torah and *mitzvot*. Rav Kook’s struggle with this dilemma is well-known: he consistently defended the secularists who built the country, insisting that one cannot judge them superficially, according to their actions alone. One must rather probe the general spiritual processes underlying the entire historical development, and thereby arrive at a deeper understanding of the specific spiritual phenomena occurring among those who live during this period.

Contradiction between Sovereignty & Morality

Less familiar, however, is another problem which Rav Kook perceived in the Zionist movement, one which is far more fundamental.

The prophets of old already recognized the essential conflict between sovereign national existence and moral life in the true sense of the term. It is exceedingly difficult to maintain appropriate moral standards within the context of full national autonomy. Regarding this conflict, Rav Kook writes (*Ma’amarei HaRe’iya*, 1:174):

Indeed, observance of the general, national Torah is especially difficult, far more difficult than observing the Torah of the individual. For Torah and *mitzvot* come to purify mankind, and the process of purifying the entire people, as a society which requires national-governmental matters, is much more complicated than the purification of each individual as a specific person...

Heaven forbid that we come to believe that the swelling waves of yearning for national sovereignty are permitted to blind our eyes so that we can no longer see clearly. And even more so, Heaven forbid that we allow the force of party politics (which will increase as the national movement comes into existence) to make us overstep the bounds of justice and truth ... For our obligation is not merely to be holy as individuals, but additionally and especially to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

This same idea appears elsewhere in Rav Kook’s writings, as well. In one instance, Rav Kook links this concept with the past history of our people, seeing therein the theological basis for exile (*Orot Ha-milchama*, p. 14):

We were forced to leave the international political stage, although there was an inner desire that we do so until the glorious time when it would be possible to conduct a government without evil or barbarism; this is the era for which we long... Our souls have been sickened by the terrible crimes of governments during evil times. But now, the time has come; very soon the world will sweeten and we will be able to prepare ourselves, for it will already be possible for us to conduct our government on the foundations of goodness, wisdom, uprightness and clear, divine illumination... It is not worthy for the nation of Israel to involve itself in government so long as governing has to be full of bloodshed, while governing requires the skill of evildoing.

Rav Kook repeats this idea in the introduction to his work, *Shabbat Ha-aretz*. There he sharply delineates the bitter conflict between moral values and “the oppression, coercion and grubbiness stemming from [the desire for] acquisition and property, which must be manifest in the world of action” (p. 8). When the negative influence of the active life became overpowering, writes Rav Kook, there was no avoiding “the terrible detachment, the expulsion of the nation from the land” (p. 11). The exile, which entailed the cessation of all political and national activities, cured the nation of Israel of the many moral ailments that had afflicted it. Pure spirituality returned to its previous level once it had been severed from active national existence. Rav Kook then allows us to share his uncertainty: how do we know when the process of recovery has been completed, when the time to renew our national existence in our land has arrived?...

Purification through Exile

It appears that Rav Kook’s high regard for the nascent Jewish State was influenced not only by his analysis of the reality that he witnessed, but also from his eschatological, historical perspective. Rav Kook simply could not accept the possibility that the lengthy, bitter exile did not correct the nation’s defects. He refused to believe that the Jews returning to their land would once again establish a government plagued by the same ethical ills that had characterized the Second Temple period. He had no choice but to believe that the new State of Israel would emerge as a just polity, whose policies and public conduct would be ethically pure.

This attitude led Rav Kook to look beyond the external behavior of his generation and to probe deeper. Based on the celebrated passage in the *Zohar* that the period preceding the Messianic era is “good on the inside but bad on the outside,” Rav Kook disclosed the pure interiors of the people of his time (*Iggerot HaRe’iya*, 1:380). From this approach emerged his famous declaration that,

Although, in actual terms, our stormy generation has not actualized itself, its potential is great. A generation such as this one ... cannot be lowly, for even if its goals are completely mistaken, its spirit is exalted, great and sublime. (*Eder Ha-yakar*, p. 111)

Similarly, Rav Kook’s confidence in the quality of redemption latent in the Jews’ return to their homeland led him to write the following a few pages later:

In the depths of its soul, *Kenesset Yisrael* has practically been cured from a sizable portion of its moral ailments brought about by its earlier misdeeds. The long, awful and terrible exile has served as a cleansing and purifying crucible for it. (ibid., pp. 114-5)

Reality Check

Here, a point of paramount importance must be emphasized: we dare not avoid testing Rav Kook’s position against the reality of historical events that have transpired since his lifetime. (As mentioned above, he died in 1935.) He wrote explicitly that “very soon” the time will arrive when a state can be conducted on the basis of justice and integrity, because the world at large will reach such a level that there will no longer be any

need for improper governmental behavior. Rav Kook wrote this approximately eighty years ago. Over the course of these eight decades, have we come any closer – even in the slightest – to the utopian reality he depicts?

Rav Kook was convinced that the corrupt Western culture would collapse after the First World War; the cataclysmic war would have to have broad repercussions. The end has finally arrived, he presumed, to the culture of falsehood that was based on trickery and corruption... Did Rav Kook ever imagine – was he capable of imagining – that World War I would not be the most horrible of wars? Did it ever occur to him that the culture of bloodshed would not crumble, but rather would continue to thrive? Rav Kook's optimism is the optimism before Auschwitz and Hiroshima. As "dwarves on the shoulders of a giant," we know that the culture of murderers has yet to be eliminated...

A Light unto the Nations?

Beyond the issue of national security, let us examine the internal condition of the Jewish State. Here, too, Rav Kook was exceedingly optimistic. He felt confident that the Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel would develop into a model society and serve as a shining example for other countries (*Ma'amarei HaRe'iyah*, 2:285-6):

The settlements in the Land of Israel are autonomous in terms of their unique public life... When we compare their moral quality with the human morals of the masses of all nations that live on their lands, and to the state of our people in the previous period, we must admit that they stand on such a high level that we can take pride in them in the eyes of the entire world.

The serious sins to which most of the masses are accustomed – theft, robbery, murder and the like – are not even heard of, the purity of the family is properly maintained; doors can remain open all night long without fear...

Rav Kook's optimistic vision predicted that as Jewish autonomy develops, so will its moral image. And specifically this development, as we saw earlier, affords the Jewish State its exalted stature and guarantees the correction of past misdeeds. Let us now take an honest look at the society before us today. Does contemporary Israeli society live up to Rav Kook's vision? Can we say about the State of Israel that "theft, robbery, murder and the like are not even heard of"? The violence, corruption and growing tensions among the various segments of society prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that we have not reached the ideal state of which Rav Kook dreamt long before the establishment of our State of Israel.

When analyzing the significance of our State, must we employ the same terms used by Rav Kook in the context of the ideal state he envisioned? May we do so? As we have seen, his mindset was suffused with a sense of optimism regarding the development of humanity as a whole, on the basis of which he foresaw the moral development of *Kenesset Yisrael*. Unfortunately – or rather, tragically – this development never occurred. We have to assess the Jewish State as it is – not as Rav Kook wanted it to be – and only then determine where it belongs within our world view.

The Hasmonean Model

Despite the many problems the State faces, we may not ignore the great miracles we experienced at the time of its establishment. Analogously, although the Hasmonean state was far from perfect, its establishment (and the return of Jewish sovereignty, albeit limited) was nevertheless a cause for celebration, as the Rambam emphasizes. The Rambam (Commentary to the Mishna, *Yoma* 1:3) knew very well the inauspicious character of the Hasmonean kings:

But in the time of the Second Temple, things were imperfect, as is well known – the kings did not follow the correct tradition and they would appoint the High Priest by force, even though he was unworthy...

Nevertheless, he felt that the establishment of the Hasmonean monarchy constitutes the main reason behind the celebration of Chanuka (*Hilkhos Chanuka* 3:1-3):

The High Priests of the Hasmonean family were victorious and killed [the Greeks], thus saving Israel from their hands. They established a king from among the priests, and monarchy returned to Israel for over two	רמב"ם הלכות מגילה וחנוכה פרק ג הלכה א ... וגברו בני חשמונאי הכהנים הגדולים והרגום והושיעו ישראל מידם והעמידו מלך מן הכהנים וחזרה מלכות לישראל יתר על מאתים שנה עד החורבן השני ...
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hundred years... Because of this, the scholars of that generation instituted that these eight days, starting from the twenty-fifth of Kislev, shall be days of joy and praise.

הלכה ג ומפני זה התקינו חכמים שבאותו הדור שיהיו שמונת הימים האלו שתחלתן מליל חמשה ועשרים בכסלו ימי שמחה והלל...

The Second Temple period thus serves as a legitimate model by which we may assess the contemporary Jewish State, a half-century after its establishment. However imperfect, one cannot overlook the many positive elements of our independent national existence. Our leaders today are no worse than the Hasmonean kings, and our country is no worse than theirs was. To the contrary, our leadership and society often exhibit moral qualities far superior to those of the Hasmonean dynasty.

Giving Thanks for the State

How can we not thank the Almighty for all the kindness that He has showered upon us? First and foremost, the State of Israel serves as a safe haven for five million Jews. After the nightmare of the Holocaust, hundreds of thousands of Jewish refugees wandered around the globe, finding a home and refuge only in Israel. The State has contributed an incalculable amount to the restoration of Jewish pride after the devastating *chillul Hashem* (desecration of God’s Name) caused by the Holocaust. Today, too, the State plays an enormous role in the Jewish identity of our brethren throughout the world. For so many of them, the emotional attachment to the State remains the final thread connecting them to the Jewish people and to the God of Israel.

I spoke earlier of Rav Kook’s inability to come to terms with the establishment of a state that would not bring to fruition the ultimate destiny of redemption. This led him to claim that the impending State of Israel was to be the ideal State of the period of *ge’ula* (redemption). But don’t all the critical functions fulfilled by the State of Israel (as listed above) justify its existence, even if it has not developed into the ideal community? After the traumatic destruction of the Holocaust, which Rav Kook could not possibly have foreseen, the State played a critical role in the restoration and revitalization of the Jewish people. It is hard to imagine what the Jewish nation would look like today if, Heaven forbid, the State of Israel had not emerged.

I experienced the horror of the destruction of European Jewry, and I can thus appreciate the great miracle of Jewish rebirth in our homeland. Are we not obligated to thank the Almighty for His kindness towards us? Unquestionably! And not just on *Yom Ha-atzma’ut*; each day we must recite *Hallel* seven times for the wonders and miracles He has performed on our behalf: “I praise you seven times each day!” (*Tehillim* 119:164).

The Prophetic Vision

Furthermore, our very existence in Israel comprises the fulfillment of the prophets’ visions:

<p>There shall yet be old men and women in the squares of Jerusalem, each with staff in hand because of their great age. And the squares of the city shall be crowded with boys and girls playing in the squares. (<i>Zekhariah</i> 8:4-5)</p>	<p>זכריה פרק ח (ד) כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה יִקְוּן צְבָאוֹת עַד יָשׁוּבוּ זְקֵנִים וְזָקֵנוֹת בְּרַחֲבוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם וְאִישׁ מִשְׁעֲנָתוֹ בִּידוֹ מְרַב יָמִים: (ה) וּרְחֻבוֹת הָעִיר יִמְלֵאוּ יְלָדִים וְיִלְדוֹת מִשְׁחֻמִים בְּרַחֲבֹתֶיהָ: ס</p>
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Regarding this vision, the prophet declares,

<p>Just as it will seem impossible to the remnant of this people in those days, so shall it also seem impossible to Me, declares the Lord of Hosts. (8:6)</p>	<p>זכריה פרק ח (ו) כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה יִקְוּן צְבָאוֹת כִּי יִפְלֵא בְעֵינַי שְׂאֵרֵית הָעָם הַזֶּה בַּיָּמִים הָהֵם גַּם־בְּעֵינַי יִפְלֵא נְאֻם יְהוָה יִקְוּן צְבָאוֹת:</p>
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What is it that seems impossible in the eyes of God? What we see with our own eyes each day: elderly people in the streets of Jerusalem! The complete redemption has yet to unfold, and we have yet to be privileged to live in state that represents “the foundation of the Divine Throne in the world.” But we have been privileged to witness the gathering of a large portion of the Jewish people to our homeland, and this phenomenon itself is to be considered the “*atchalta de-ge’ula*” (“beginning of the redemption”).

Certain characterizing features of the time of redemption have, indeed, appeared. We must sing praises to the Almighty for even this partial redemption, which still lacks the components of the complete redemption.

My spiritual outlook is based on and nourished by the writings of Rav Kook. His works sustained me during my difficult days in a Nazi labor camp, and in their merit I managed to withstand the difficult trials I have encountered. But specifically because of what I learned from his teachings, I believe that we, the

followers of his approach, must view the current situation in accordance with reality, and not quote passages written eighty years ago without considering their applicability to our period.

Unlike the *Charedim*, we will not undermine the importance or legitimacy of the State; but our love for our country must not blind us from criticizing its shortcomings. We remain very, very far from the ideal Jewish State, and we must therefore do whatever we can to bring about its realization. A more just society and stronger public values are necessary prerequisites for its actualization. If we want to hasten the ultimate redemption, we must work harder to ensure moral values on both the individual and communal levels. Closing the social gaps, concern for the vulnerable elements of society, fighting poverty, respectful treatment of the non-Jews in Israel – all these measures will bring us closer to the day for which we long. We hope and believe that our State will develop into the ideal Jewish State, “the foundation of the Divine Throne in the world, whose entire desire is that God shall be One and His Name shall be One.”

6. R. Yehuda Amital, “What is the Meaning of ‘Reishit Tzemichat Ge’ulatenu’?,” Tradition 39:3 (2006)

When Rav Herzog spoke of "the beginning of the flowering of our redemption," he did not mean the messianic redemption; rather, he meant the simple redemption consisting of Jewish sovereignty in the land. The Chatam Sofer (*parashat Shoftim*, p. 37) comments that several times during the course of history, the Holy One wanted to redeem Israel with an incomplete redemption – as during the period of the Second Temple – but the nation of Israel refused, for we have no desire for an incomplete redemption, without *Mashiach*. The Chatam Sofer wrote this prior to the Holocaust, but after that terrible period during which people sailed aimlessly in boats, with no home, we understand that there was never any *chillul Hashem* – desecration of God's Name – like the Holocaust, nor any *kiddush Hashem* – sanctification of God's Name – like the establishment of the State. There can be no doubt that praise and thanks should be offered for the establishment of the State, even if it is not a messianic redemption, the "revealed end."

Indeed, in 1948 we did not speak of the *Mashiach*. We prayed for *malkhut Yisrael*, and sufficed with sovereignty comparable to that of the Second Temple period. There is no doubt that we attained at least that much. During Ezra's time, very few people came back to Israel; in our time – thank God, we have reached five, six million. We never had such numbers here!...

At the same time, after the Six-Day War, some Jews – both religious and secular – stood up and said that the partition of the land that had been forced upon us by the U.N. during the British mandate should be nullified. One of these people was Prof. Yisrael Eldad, who said to me: "We're finished with the partition; let's get back to the Greater Land of Israel."

These people began to speak about a vision of the complete *Eretz Yisrael*, but they didn't notice the Arabs living within the borders of that "Whole Land of Israel." At the time of the establishment of the State, the Arab population within the borders of the country was relatively small, and there was a chance that the Jewish nation would remain the majority for the long term. Today, after our conquest of Judea, Samaria and Gaza, there arises a risk that the State will not remain Jewish. When the government agreed that marriage and divorce would be handled in this country in accordance with religious principles, and that public institutions would observe *kashrut*, this flowed from the sense that this is a Jewish country. But in a Jewish country there must be a Jewish majority, and this is diminishing with time.

For this reason, since the Six-Day War, no government of Israel has dreamed of annexing Judea, Samaria and Gaza as part of the State of Israel. We annexed the Golan Heights, where there are no Arabs, and Jerusalem – based on the view that we could deal with the number of Arabs living there. But annexing Judea, Samaria and Gaza? How long could we hold on without giving the Arabs the right to vote? Even those on the far left admit that the Arabs should not be granted the "right of return," for this would destroy the Jewishness of the State. Two approaches were proposed to deal with the problem of how to retain the entire land despite the demographic issue. One, led by Rechavam Ze'evi *Hy"d* and fundamentally secular, claimed that the solution was a "transfer" of the Arabs. Aside from the moral problem involved, no Arab state agrees to take in these Arabs. Still, the "transfer" approach arose from logical reasoning: if we want to annex the entire *Eretz Yisrael*, we must find a solution to the demographic problem.

A second approach, whose proponents included religious people with a zealous vision of a Greater *Eretz Yisrael*, claimed that the solution would be found with the coming of the *Mashiach*, and since the *Mashiach* is already knocking at the door, there is no need to worry about the pragmatic, actual ramifications of our actions. This messianic thinking - which perceived the *Mashiach* as already lurking somewhere in the Jerusalem mountains and soon to be revealed to us – is what led to this view.

To my sorrow, I have not merited Divine inspiration. I have never met a prophet who fit all of the Rambam's identifying criteria, who told me that the *Mashiach* is already on the way. When I established the yeshiva, the architect who thought up the shape of the *beit midrash* planned it without windows. I told her about the *tzaddik* in whose town a *shofar* blast was once heard, and the whole community thought that the *Mashiach* had arrived. The *tzaddik* poked his nose out of the window, sniffed gently, and said: "No. When the *Mashiach* comes, it will be possible to sense it in the air." A *beit midrash* needs windows, in order to be able to sense when the *Mashiach* is coming. If I haven't yet sensed the *Mashiach*'s footsteps – it is a sign that the *Mashiach* hasn't yet come...

In any event, we must rejoice today just as we rejoiced in 1948. We must recognize that just as the Holocaust was a gargantuan *chillul Hashem*, so the State of Israel is the greatest *kiddush Hashem*. We have a problem with giving away parts of *Eretz Yisrael*, but let us look at what the Holy One has done for us! We have an independent State, we are a prosperous country, and we are militarily strong. True, there is poverty and there are plenty of other problems, but it is difficult to conceive of the magnitude of the change that has been wrought in our condition over the past sixty years.