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*A Philosophy of Jewish Laws
and Observances*

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PROFANING AND HALLOWING OF
THE HOLY NAME

איסור חילול השם ומצוות קידוש השם

Therefore shall ye keep My commandments, and do them: I am the Lord.

Neither shall ye profane My holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the Lord who hallow you, that brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord.

LEVIT. XXII, 31-33.

We, son and daughter of Israel, crossed together the threshold of 610 Israel's Temple to approach unto God, and as we entered we heard God pronounce His Holy Name, that we should adopt Him as our God, He Who brought us out of Egypt for that purpose—and, raising our eyes towards Him, we said: Thou art my God!, and in that moment and in that pronouncement, we vowed mind and heart, word and deed to the fulfilment of His holy will. We have journeyed through the majestic temples of active Jewish life, and have hearkened to the duties to which the Holy Name calls us and which we have taken upon ourselves. The Holy Name of God which you bear, my son and my daughter, shall call you to everything that is beautiful and good, to truth,¹ to justice,² and to love.³ It is the same Name which dedicates every one of your brothers and sisters in Israel to the same way of life, which calls all mankind to gather round Him and to dedicate themselves to Him. And—let your heart rejoice at this lofty thought—not for yourself alone have you taken upon yourself God's Holy Name—nay, by the manner in which you bear it shall the life of your brothers and sisters in Israel be illumined and hallowed, by the manner in which Israel bears this Holy Name shall it shine like a ray of light through the vicissitudes of history, and shall be a monument to God, the One and Only, and to mankind's sacred vocation.

Therefore, just as at the entrance to the Temple we are greeted with the words:

'I am the Lord thy God that brought you out of the land of Egypt—out of slavery,'
so, as we leave, we are accompanied by the words:

'Therefore shall ye keep My commandments and do them: I am the Lord.'

¹תורות וערות. ²משפטים וחוקים. ³מצוות.

'Neither shall ye profane My holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the Lord who hallow you,

'that brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord.'

It shall accompany us and warn us against profaning the Holy Name, exhort us to the hallowing of the Holy Name which we bear.

- 611 Do not profane His Holy Name, which you bear. Do not destroy the sacred acknowledgment which it has found in the minds of your brothers and sisters in Israel! If you do not lead a godly life, if you live in a manner unworthy of the Name you bear, if you harbour lies and selfishness in your mind and heart, if your possession is unjust, if your pleasure is mean, if your deeds are heartless, if you profane the Crown of Sinai, just to indulge a mood, a liking, a preference—if your life shows that the all-holy God and His holy will are not sacred to you, that you do not hold them as the highest and that you hold other things above them—possessions, pleasure, worldly honours, or anything else—to which you would sacrifice the former, see, then, not only do you kill in yourself the Holy Name, so that it no longer educates you to holiness, but you also destroy its sacred acknowledgment in the mind of your brother, you show that one can be a Jew and yet be unjust, and profane, and heartless—and invite others to be the same. Do not profane the Holy Name (compare Maimonides, *Yesodei HaTorah*, chap. 5: 10).
- 612 Above all, the call goes out to the heads of the community and its spiritual leaders, to all who stand out as the spiritual pillars of religion, as being familiar with the Torah, as disciples of the wise men, *Talmidei Chachamim* (תַּלְמִידֵי חָכָםִים), as the wise men are called—to all those in particular God's call goes forth. Do not profane My Holy Name which you bear, which should be hallowed through you, taught and implanted in the minds of your brothers and sisters by your word and example, do not profane it! Not only by not committing deeds that are really unjust, profane and heartless, but also by refraining from anything that might have even the semblance of being so in the eyes of others. In your case, not only is the sin sin, but also the semblance of sin, the proximity to sin, for this begets sin in the mind and life of your brother. How shall the rest turn towards the light of the Torah when they may see, or be given some justification for believing, that the bearer of the Torah light himself is not illumined by it? How shall they choose the Torah as their life's guide when they may see or believe that those who are learned in the Torah do not take it as their own guidance? How shall they learn to regard the Torah as holy when they may see or have reason for believing that even those familiar with the Torah do not hold it sacred in life and deed, and are not sanctified by it?

Only when the priest himself respects knowledge, when he, a messenger of godliness, stands forth pure as an angel do they seek learning from his lips! (*cf.* Maimonides, *Yesodei HaTorah*, chap. 5: 11, and Mal. ii, 7).

What the priest is to his people, so should Israel be to the whole of mankind. When, in the choice of Abraham, the foundation-stone of this people was laid, God, Who did it, pronounced its significance: 'and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed' (Gen. xii, 3), and explained the blessing that came from this choice: . . . seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment' (Gen. xviii, 18)—meaning that Abraham's descendants should follow with love and justice in the ways of God and by this silent example become a blessed monument to God and humanity among the peoples of the earth, so that they should be 'a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation' (Exod. xix, 6).

As the priest among the people, so should they among mankind uphold the vision of God and humanity and by so doing be a holy nation, raised above every injustice, profaneness and hardheartedness, as becomes the bearers of such a message. Brothers and sisters, if only we lived up to such a noble vocation! Let us, calmly and devoutly, endure the fate which God lays upon us for our education and for His Revelation to mankind, remain modest in easy times, strong and confident and striving for improvement in times of oppression. Let us live our Jewish life quietly and modestly, illumine and strengthen mind and soul through the teachings of the Torah; perpetuate these teachings for ourselves and others by observing our Festivals of Commemoration, fulfil them by a life of justice and love towards every creature that bears the seal of God's creating, as our religion teaches us. If, thus, we were truthful, just and holy and loving in mind and soul, in possession and enjoyment, in word and deed, if then God would let this promise of salvation grow out of our fate and our life: that the whole of mankind, awakened by its own experience, enlightened anew and uplifted by our destiny and life, should, in unity with us, turn to the One and Only—and if thus we would fulfil our vocation as priests to humanity—what bliss there would be, matured through century upon century of wretchedness and misery and hunger!

But because Israel has such a high and sacred vocation, because, for the working out of this destiny, every son and every daughter of Israel is obliged to contribute thereto by their behaviour in their own humble circle—how careful do we need to be in our behaviour, in particular in the way in which we conduct ourselves towards non-Jews, so that they

may see in our lives really only a reflection of the Torah of truth, of justice and of love!

Therefore, once more so urgently to *all of us* goes out the call: Do not profane My Holy Name! Do not destroy, through your way of living, the recognition of the all-holy God and His word in the minds of the nations among which you live!

If you were to accept wantonly or complainingly from God's hands the joys or the sorrows which he inflicts on Israel—if your soul were to remain unillumined and your mind unwarmed by the fire of the law; if you were to neglect or to observe only carelessly the Festivals of Commemoration, which should awaken man's mind and raise his soul towards God; if your possessions were to flourish on injustice and your enjoyment on profaneness; if, in your dealings with non-Jews, you were to practise lies and cunning instead of truth, deceit and injustice instead of justice, hardheartedness and selfishness instead of love; if you were to abandon God and His teachings and everything holy and great to which the name of Jew exhorts you . . . if you were to sacrifice all that for the sake of material advantages, of increasing your possessions, of satisfying your desires, of acquiring worldly honours and esteem, or even of escaping from an unjust oppression; if you were to do all that, then you would kill the recognition which you should inspire in others, you would turn away from you those whom you should win over, you would bring into contempt that which should be respected through you, you would turn into night the light which is destined to shine through you, you would degrade the Sanctuary which should be consecrated through you, and you would profane the Name of the all-hallowed God and His Torah, whose bearer and whose priest it is your sole destiny to be.

Therefore our Sages say: 'The crimes of stealing and injustice are greater towards a non-Jew than towards a Jew'; for towards a Jew it is the simple violation of a commandment, 'Thou shalt not steal,' etc. But in the case of a non-Jew, as well as being that, it is also that great crime which can only be expiated by death: the *chillul HaShem*, profanation of the Divine Name. Every Jew who deceives or cheats a non-Jew commits this greatest of all crimes, and, indeed, it is said: 'and those that remain of Israel shall not commit injustice, shall not speak false things, neither shall their lips utter words of deceit!' And here, again, avoid not only real injustice, real hardheartedness, but even the semblance of them (*מראות העין*) towards your non-Jewish brethren; for the semblance is the crime as much as the actual sin, because it—as with the sin itself—breeds contempt for that very thing which it is your task to maintain as holy (*ענשות*, *Prohibitions*, II, 151, and Ch. M. in various places).

¹ *ספר מצוות נרוי*, *The Great Book of Commandments*, by R. Moses of Coucy (1200–1260).
—Ed. Note.

God has set us down with the eyes of the world upon us and for centuries past the world has been in the habit of laying the blame for the crime of one single Jew at the door of the whole of Jewry, and of concluding from the manner in which the children of Israel live how the law of Israel demands that its children should live. Do you not see, then, that on your own individual life the honour of your people depends, and upon the behaviour of the children of Israel depends the respect for the One and Only God and His law? Do you not see how an unworthy step in your life degrades not only you, yourself, but the whole House of Israel, yes, even God and the Revelation of His word? Let us then remember that the eyes of the world are upon us. Let each one live in the consciousness that upon him rests the honour of the whole House of Jacob, the fulfilment of Israel's task, the hallowing of God and His law, and let us live in such a way that we offer to the eyes of the world nothing but a pure, good Jewish life based on the Torah, and not give the lie to the words of the Prophet:

'Thy people also shall be all righteous; at a future time as yet unknown, their ideals will prevail in the mind of man;¹ they are the branch of my planting, the work of my hands, that I may be glorified through them.' (Isa. ix, 21.)

Chillul HaShem (חַלְלָת הָשֵׁם), profaning the Divine Name, destruction of the recognition of God and His Torah, is such a fearful crime that our Sages do not know of any worse one. 'All sins,' they say, 'can be fully atoned for by genuine *teshuvah*, Yom Kippur and suffering,' but of *chillul HaShem* the Scriptures say, 'This sin shall never be forgiven unto you until your death' (Isa. xxii, 14; *Yoma*, 86). 'Whoever profanes the Name of God, even not publicly, shall publicly receive retribution; the profaning of the Divine Name is the same whether it be done heedlessly or wantonly; and prompt shall be the punishment for such a profaning' (*Avoth*, IV, 5; B Talmud, *Kiddushin*, 40). And truly, if you bear the Name of God and your mode of living profanes this Holy Name, if your shameful life is deemed compatible with, in fact approved by, the holy will, then your destruction is necessary in order to show that your life is a defiance of His will and thus to re-establish the recognition of the All-holy, which you have trodden underfoot. And would you excuse yourself, saying that you were thoughtless when you profaned God's Name? Dare you be thoughtless when you are concerned with the very highest? Is not the very fact that you could profane the Name of God out of thoughtlessness a sign that the All-hallowed is not

¹ מִלְּאָמָּה: cf. Exod. iii, 15.

From סְמִינָה: 'secret,' 'concealed.' At an uncertain time that lies as yet unhidden in the womb of the future, Israel's ideals will prevail in the mind of man.

See Y. Talmud, *Yoma*, III, 40a; *Pesachim*, 50a; *Michr. Tehillim* to Ps. ix, 1; and Hirsch, *Commentary on Exod.* iii, 15.—*Ed. Note.*

important to you, that He is not *the* most important, the very highest, if you were able to forget Him? And is not such carelessness in itself a profanation of the Divine—in itself a crime?

615 But if it be true that Israel is the bearer of the Most Holy and that the Divine Name is profaned whenever or wherever in Israel the Most Holy is not held sacred or is not respected as the Most High to which everything must be subordinated—if this is true, then your own perfection alone cannot be your goal, it is not enough to salvage your own individual saintliness from the shipwreck of error; you must sacrifice everything, you must never pause or rest until in the whole community of Israel the Name of God is worthily borne, every disfiguring stain effaced from Zion's noble daughter, and in Jewish circles everywhere the One and Only and His will stand forth as the very highest, for Whom and by Whose command it is Israel's destiny to stand as monument and witness. For this reason it is not enough that you should *not profane* the Holy Name. For the Scriptures continue, ‘But I will be hallowed among the children of Israel!’ You shall hallow by your example the Name of God among your brethren, you shall show by your example and bear witness by your deeds that the true son and the true daughter of Israel hold nothing higher than God and the fulfilment of His Divine will. And you shall, if it be necessary, willingly seal this testimony with your life, in that, if it must be, you offer it up in order to preserve your loyalty towards God and to inspire such loyalty in your brethren. You will achieve more then by your death than by your life, for you leave behind to the congregation of Israel an eternal example of faith which will inspire your children and your children's children to a life of saintliness.

But if you sacrifice yourself to the hallowing of the Holy Name, do not expect a miracle to save you; leave it in God's hands; He alone can judge which is more worth while, death in the present or the life that might still be left to you.¹

‘Therefore shall ye keep My commandments and do them: I am the Lord.

‘Neither shall ye profane My holy name; but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel: I am the Lord who hallow you,

‘that brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the Lord.’ (Levit. xxii, 31–33.)

¹ In regard to the question of the circumstances in which a Jew is obliged to sacrifice his life rather than commit a transgression (*הריגת נולך עבירה*), see above, chap. 9.—*Ed. Note.*