

Sanctifying Hashem's Name

Introduction

Must Man Sanctify Hashem?

The concept of sanctifying Hashem's name ("קידוש השם") is considered by many to be one of the central precepts of Judaism. Perhaps surprisingly, however, nowhere in Torah is there an explicit command to do so. Though several verses admonish against profaning Hashem's name, both in connection with specific prohibitions¹ as well as more generally,² no parallel directive exists for sanctification. Hashem speaks repeatedly about His sanctifying of the nation,³ but it is unclear whether it is man, or only God, who can sanctify Hashem Himself.⁴ After all, how can a human make Hashem holy? What would it mean to sanctify His name?



"וּנְקַדְשֵׁתִי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל"

The often cited source for the obligation to sanctify Hashem's name is found in Vayikra 22:

(לא) וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם מִצְוֹתַי וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם אֲנִי יי'. (לב) וְלֹא תַחֲלִלוּ אֶת שֵׁם קִדְשִׁי וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲנִי יי' מְקַדְשְׁכֶם. (לג) הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם לִהְיוֹת לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים אֲנִי יי'.

(31) And ye shall keep My commandments, and do them: I am the Lord.

(32) And ye shall not profane My holy name; but **I will be hallowed among the children of Israel**: I am the Lord who hallow you,

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

This source, however, is far from a simple one. First, the phrase "וּנְקַדְשֵׁתִי" is not formulated in the imperative, as expected of a command, but is rather a passive form, as if it is merely the consequence of a previous action. Moreover, the verse comes at the end of a unit dealing with priestly laws, suggesting that it is aimed at them specifically. In fact, throughout the previous chapters, there are numerous parallel verses,⁵ all of which target specific priestly rituals and have little to do with the rest of the nation's actions. On the other hand, this verse does differ from the parallel verses in that it is preceded by the general instruction of "וּשְׁמֵרְתֶם מִצְוֹתַי" and closes with the additional "הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם", perhaps allowing for a connection to both a broader audience ("בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל") and a wider range of actions.

Martyrdom and Sanctification?

The sanctification of Hashem's name is commonly associated with the concept of sacrificing one's life for Hashem. Yet, it is difficult to find an explicit discussion of the obligation of martyrdom in the Torah.⁶ It is only in the much later book of Daniel,⁷ that we read of how Daniel and his friends were willing to be killed rather than transgress various commandments.⁸ Does the Torah mandate forfeiting one's life? If so, under what circumstances and for which commandments? Finally, is martyrdom related to the sanctification of Hashem's name and the aforementioned verses of Vayikra 22?

¹ See Vayikra 19:12 with regards to swearing falsely, Vayikra 20:3 regarding worship of the Molekh, and Vayikra 21:6 and Vayikra 22:2 regarding priestly conduct. In the Prophets and Writings, mention of desecration of Hashem's name is also connected to prostitution (Amos 2:7), idolatry (Yechezkel 20:39), murder (Yechezkel 36:19-24), and defiling the Mikdash (Yechezkel 43:7-8, Malakhi 1:11-12).

² See Vayikra 22:32: "וְלֹא תִמְלִיכוּ אֶת שְׁמִי קְדוֹשִׁי".

³ See, for instance, Vayikra 20:7-8, 21:23, and 22:32.

⁴ See Yechezkel 36:23 where Hashem speaks of how He will sanctify His own name, but see also Yeshayahu 29:22-23 which describes children sanctifying His name (Rambam, following Shir HaShirim Rabbah, interprets this verse to refer to the stories of martyrdom in the Book of Daniel). In Bemidbar 20:12, as well, Moshe and Aharon are chided for not sanctifying Hashem.

⁵ Variations of "וְלֹא יִמְלִיכוּ אֶת שְׁמִי קְדוֹשִׁי" appear in Vayikra 21:6, 21:15, 21:23, 22:2, and 22:15.

⁶ As noted above, the context of the verse "וְנִקְדְּשִׁיתִי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל", understood by many to be the source for "קִידוּשׁ הַשֵּׁם", is not overly connected to forfeiting one's life. The verse of "וְאֶהְבֶּתְךָ אֶת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל" in Devarim 6:5 is another potential source for the obligation of martyrdom (see Approaches and Ahavat Hashem); however, it too can sustain multiple other interpretations.

⁷ See Daniel 1, Daniel 3, and Daniel 6.

⁸ While Chananyah, Mishael and Azaryah risk their lives in Daniel 3 over idolatry, Daniel acts similarly in Daniel 6 for prayer, and they all appear to place themselves in jeopardy in Daniel 1 over the dietary laws.

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Exegetical Approaches

This topic has not yet undergone editorial review

Overview

Though the verse "וְנִקְדְּשֵׁתִי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" has been used by many as the source of the commandment to sanctify Hashem's name, commentators disagree whether it in fact constitutes an obligation at all and regarding what sanctification of Hashem means. Ibn Ezra claims that the phrase contains no directive to act and simply describes the consequence of proper priestly actions. Rambam and R. D"Z Hoffmann, in contrast, maintain that the verse constitutes a general commandment which admonishes the Children of Israel to be careful in observance and behavior so that others will laud and recognize Hashem's holiness. Finally, many sources do view the verse as the source for the obligation of martyrdom, but they disagree as to which circumstances are included.

Result of Observance

The words "וְנִקְדְּשֵׁתִי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" describe a result of the sanctification of Hashem's name, but do not constitute an obligation to perform a specific action.

SOURCES: R. Yochanan in Bavli Berakhot and Bavli Megillah, Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, Sforno, Netziv

Passive form of "וְנִקְדְּשֵׁתִי" – The passive form of the word "וְנִקְדְּשֵׁתִי" supports this position, suggesting that the sanctification is a consequence rather than a command.

Who will sanctify Hashem's name?

- **The priests** – According to Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel, the verse is directed at the priests. Ibn Ezra asserts that if they adhere to the sacrificial laws which immediately precede this passage (not slaughtering a mother and son together and properly offering thanksgiving sacrifices), then Hashem's name will be sanctified. Abarbanel relates the sanctification more broadly to general observance by the priests.
- **The nation** – According to R. Yochanan in the Bavli and the Netziv, the verse refers to the public sanctification of Hashem's name (through the recital of "דברים שבקדושה") by a quorum of ten Israelites ("בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל").
- **Hashem Himself** – Sforno maintains that if the people do not profane Hashem's name through improper or debased conduct, then Hashem will perform miracles for them and sanctify Himself in their midst.

What does it mean to "sanctify Hashem"? According to most of these sources, it appears that Hashem is sanctified by the nation's recognition of His glory. Thus, Abarbanel says that proper priestly conduct leads the rest of the nation to honor and fear Hashem, and Sforno explains¹ that Hashem will be glorified by the people's witnessing of His wondrous deeds.

Context of Vayikra 22:31-33 – These sources differ in their understandings of how the verse of "וְנִקְדְּשֵׁתִי" connects to its surrounding context:

- **Closes unit beginning in 22:26** – Ibn Ezra views the verses as ending the immediately preceding unit (Vayikra 22:26-30), which he believes is directed at the priests.² It thus parallels several variations of "ולא תחללו" which appear throughout the chapter³ which similarly serve to remind the priests to be careful not to profane Hashem and His sanctity.
- **Closes Chapters 21-22** – Abarbanel may instead view the verses as the summation of the larger unit of Chapters 21-22 which speak of priestly laws and the Mikdash. As mentioned, these chapters contain the recurring motif "ולא תחללו" which appear throughout the chapter³ which similarly serve to remind the priests to be careful not to profane Hashem and His sanctity.
- **Closes unit beginning in 22:17** – Sforno might take a middle position, suggesting that verses 22:31-33 conclude the unit beginning 22:17. In contrast to the earlier units in Chapters 21-22 which were directed at the priests only, the second half of Chapter 22 is addressed to both the priest and the nation ("דבר אל בני ישראל"), allowing for the possibility that 22:31-33, too, is directed at everyone.
- **Connected to Chapter 23** – The Netziv uniquely suggests that all of verses 22:26-33 are connected not to what precede them, but rather to what follow: the laws of the festivals.⁴ This enables him to suggest that 22:31 speaks of sanctification of Hashem during public prayers, such as those recited during the pilgrimage festivals.⁵

Relationship to the prohibition of "ולא תחללו את שם קדשי"

- According to Ibn Ezra, Abarbanel, and Sforno, this is an active command (aimed at either the priests⁶ or the nation⁷), the observance of which results in Hashem's sanctification.⁸
- In contrast, according to the Netziv, there is no connection between "ולא תחללו" and "ונקדשתי" except that they are both connected to the festivals. "ולא תחללו" represents a warning not to behave inappropriately when celebrating, as often happened in pagan rituals and celebrations.

Sources for martyrdom – According to this position, "ונקדשתי" does not constitute the source for an obligation of martyrdom. Thus, following various Rabbinic sources,⁹ the Netziv derives the obligation to forfeit one's life rather than transgress the three cardinal sins of idolatry, illicit relations, and murder from the entirely separate verse of "ואהבת את יי אלהיך בכל לבבך ובכל נפשך".¹⁰



Positive Behavior

The phrase "ונקדשתי בתוך בני ישראל" is a general commandment which obligates people to behave in a manner which will sanctify God's name.

SOURCES: Perhaps R. Saadia Gaon,¹¹ Rambam,¹² R. D"Z Hoffmann¹³

Passive form of "ונקדשתי" – The passive form is difficult for this approach, as one would expect a command to be formulated in the imperative. These sources might suggest that the command is simply implied,¹⁴ perhaps similar to the statement "I am the Lord your God..." which (despite its lack of an imperative form) is understood by many to constitute the source of the obligation to know or believe in Hashem.¹⁵

What type of behavior sanctifies Hashem's name?

- **Performing commandments purely out of love** – Rambam asserts that a person sanctifies Hashem's name when he observes His commandments purely out of love without an ulterior motive. This would suggest that sanctification can be internal as no one else is aware of the individual's thoughts.
- **Actions that cause others to praise** – Rambam also claims that if a person behaves in a way that leads others to praise him, such as having a pleasant demeanor, good manners and speech,¹⁶ he thereby sanctifies Hashem's name. This points to an external understanding of sanctification, as an act that leads others to glorify Hashem.
- **General upright behavior** – R. Saadia Gaon and R. D"Z Hoffmann speak more generally about being upright in every action, observing Hashem's commandments, and being subservient to Him.¹⁷

Context of Vayikra 22:31-33 – As the immediate context of these verses relates specifically to priestly laws, the sudden shift to speak of commandments relating to the broader behavior of the nation at large requires explanation. R. D"Z Hoffmann thus suggests that 22:31-33 serves as a summation for the much larger unit of the Holiness laws which stretches from Chapter 19 through 22.¹⁸ According to him, the general command of "וְשַׁמְרֶתֶם מִצְוֹתַי וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אֹתָם" in verse 31¹⁹ proves that the entire concluding pericope is connected to more than only the immediately preceding cultic law unit.

Relationship to the prohibition of "וְלֹא תִחַלְלוּ אֶת שֵׁם קֹדֶשׁ־יְיָ" – Rambam and R. Hoffmann view the two commandments as flip sides of a coin, the only difference being the positive or negative formulation. As such, desecration of Hashem's name would include sinning purely to spite or anger Hashem, behaving in a way which brings disrepute to Hashem, or general negligence in observance.

Sources for martyrdom – Similar to the first approach, this position could also derive the obligation of martyrdom from the separate verse of "וְאַהֲבַת אֱתֵי אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ וּבְכָל נַפְשֶׁךָ".



Martyrdom

"וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" mandates the forfeiting of one's life to avoid transgressing commandments in certain situations.

SOURCES: Sifra Vayikra, Yerushalmi Sanhedrin, Bavli Sanhedrin, Bavli Avodah Zarah, Rashi, Sefer Yereim, Rambam, Sefer Mitzvot Gadol, Sefer Mitzvot Katan, Ramban, Ralbag

Passive form of "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי" – Like the second approach, this position must maintain that "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי" is an anomalous commandment which is not formulated in the imperative.

Context – As nothing in the adjacent verses speaks of martyrdom, these sources struggle to explain the placement of the commandment. R. David HaKokhavi suggests that the context of sacrifices teaches that though animal sacrifices generally substitute for human sacrifice, there are certain exceptional circumstances in which the Torah demands the actual sacrifice of human life for Hashem's honor.

What is included? These sources disagree under which circumstances and for which commandments the command "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי" obligates forfeiture of one's life:

- **All commandments, but only in public** – Most of these sources maintain that the command only speaks of the need to forfeit one's life when asked to transgress a commandment in public, "בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל".

יִשְׂרָאֵל". This suggest that sanctification of Hashem relates to His glorification by others, and thus, by definition, requires witnesses.

- **Also the three cardinal sins, even in private** – Rambam in his Iggeret HaShemad and Mishneh Torah goes further to also include the sins of idolatry, illicit relations and murder, even without witnesses.²⁰ Rambam might suggest that the phrase "בְּתוֹךְ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל",²¹ rather than who must be present. According to this view, sanctification of Hashem might be an internal, rather than external act. A person sanctifies Hashem by his individual recognition of the primacy of Hashem's commandments and valuing them over his own life.
- **Only the sin of idolatry in public** – R. Yishmael and Rambam in his Sefer HaMitzvot²² go in the opposite direction, limiting the obligation to the sin of idolatry in a public setting. This position might view sanctification as a declaration of faith,²³ in which case the narrowing of the scope of martyrdom to idolatry is logical.

Other sources for martyrdom – The majority of sources which maintain that "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי" does not include forfeiting one's life for the three cardinal sins in private differ regarding the source for this obligation:

- **Variety of sources** – Bavli Sanhedrin²⁴ suggests that idolatry can be derived from "וְאִם בָּתּוּ אֵת יְיָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ", while murder is learned from a logical deduction²⁵ and illicit relations via an inference (הִיקֵשׁ) from the laws of murder.
- **Severity of sin** – R. David, following R. Acha in Tosefta Shabbat, suggests that due to the severity of these sins, they never fell under the general leniency of "וְיָמֵי בְהֵם",²⁶ and thus their original prohibition remains in effect even in private.²⁷
- **No source or obligation** – This position could also say that there is no obligation of martyrdom in private even for the three cardinal sins.

What is learned from "וְאִם בָּתּוּ"? Rambam understands this to be an intellectual commandment, a striving to know and love God, which contains no obligation to act on that love.²⁸ Ramban, in contrast, views it as an act of self sacrifice. Each is consistent with their understanding of the sources for the obligation of martyrdom discussed above. See Ahavat Hashem for elaboration on each position.

Relationship to the prohibition of "וְלֹא תַחֲלִלוּ אֶת שֵׁם קְדוֹשִׁי"

- Rambam and Ralbag views the two commandments as two halves of a whole, one being the negative formulation of the other.²⁹
- Ramban, however, disconnects "וְלֹא תַחֲלִלוּ" and "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי" suggesting that the former relates to the immediate context of sacrificial worship and is an admonition to the nation to be careful in those laws.

¹ See his citation of the verse of Shemot 34:10.

² The verses open only with "וְיַדְבֵּר יְיָ אֶל מִשְׁחָה" making the intended audience ambiguous, but since the next chapter has a new opening which specifies "וְיַדְבֵּר אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל", Ibn Ezra claims that the original unit must not have been addressed to the entire nation, but rather to the priests alone.

³ See Vayikra 21:6, 21:12-15, 21:23, 22:2, and 22:15. Almost all of these also serve as either introductory or closing statements.

⁴ Since it was common that people would wait until the various festivals to fulfill vows that they had made or to bring thanksgiving offerings, the laws of these verses (which relate to such sacrifices and are thus

particularly pertinent on the festivals) are brought here, right before the chapter dealing with the pilgrimage festivals. He suggests that this is the reason that the Torah reading on Pesach and Sukkot begin with these verses, and not Chapter 23.

⁵ Netziv suggests that although the people in Israel prayed every day, due to their being spread apart in their agricultural pursuits, people were not able to pray together in a group except when they went to Jerusalem during the festivals. As such, the requirement of a quorum for "דברים שבקדושה" is mentioned only in this context.

⁶ See Ibn Ezra and Abarbanel.

⁷ See Sforno.

⁸ According to them the *vav* of "וּנְקִדְשֵׁתִי" is consequential rather than additive.

⁹ See Mishna Berakhot, Sifre Devarim, Bavli Berakhot, Bavli Pesachim, and Bavli Sanhedrin.

¹⁰ Alternatively, this approach could consider the possibility that there is no unique verse which mandates forfeiting one's life for the observing of commandments.

¹¹ R. Saadia's position cannot be established with any degree of certainty based on a few words from his Azharot on the Aseret HaDibberot. In a second set of Azharot on the Taryag Mitzvot, he does not enumerate sanctifying Hashem's name at all. The extant fragments of R. Saadia's Sefer HaMitzvot are still awaiting (reportedly, imminent) publication.

¹² See below that Rambam derives also the obligation of martyrdom from this phrase.

¹³ R. D"Z Hoffmann also cites Bavli Berakhot that the verse teaches that a quorum of ten is needed for "דברים שבקדושה" (see above) and Bavli Sanhedrin which derives from it the obligation of martyrdom (see below).

¹⁴ They might further suggest that since the prohibition against profaning Hashem is written in the imperative, and sanctification is simply the flip side of this prohibition, it was self evident that it too is a command.

¹⁵ See, for example, Rambam Sefer HaMitzvot Positive Commandment 1 and Ramban and Rabbag on Shemot 20:2. In this case, too, however, not all agree that the verse constitutes a commandment.

¹⁶ See also Bavli Sotah which points to Yehudah as sanctifying Hashem's name when admitting his guilt before Tamar, and to the behavior of the sages in Bavli Yoma.

¹⁷ R. Hoffmann claims that it is through such servitude that Hashem is proclaimed as holy.

¹⁸ These open with the directive "קְדֹשִׁים תִּהְיוּ", and contain many warnings directed at the entire nation regarding both desecration of Hashem and sanctification of the people. See Vayikra 19:1-2, 19:12,20:3, and 20:7-8 which are aimed at the nation at large, and 21:6, 21:15, 21:23, 20:22, and 22:15 which are directed at the priests.

¹⁹ He points out that this general admonition to heed Hashem's commandments parallels other similar warnings in Vayikra 19:37, 20:8 and 20:22. The summation also ends with mention of Hashem "הַמוֹצִיא אֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִמְּאֲרָץ מִצְרַיִם", since the purpose of the Exodus was to make the Children of Israel into a "מְמַלְכֵת כְּהִנּוּם וְגוֹיִם". Thus, the summation of 22:31-33 contains the motifs found in all of the chapters of Vayikra 19-22 and forms an appropriate conclusion for the entire Holiness unit.

²⁰ Rambam is the first to explicitly include these, doing so in his Iggeret HaShemad. It is possible that he is motivated by his need to defend the Jews of his time who had been forcibly converted (אנוסים). By suggesting that the obligation of martyrdom for the three cardinal sins fell under the general obligation of "וּנְקִדְשֵׁתִי" (and not from the inherent severity of the sins themselves) he was able to lessen the guilt of those

who chose not to forfeit their lives. Since they acted only under pressure, the original sin of idolatry lost its strength, so that their only transgression was that they did not adhere to the command of "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי". He writes, "וברוב המקומות אמרו אנוס רחמנא פטריה ולא נקרא לא פושע ולא רשע... אלא שהוא לא קיים מצות קדוש השם". Had the obligation stemmed from the cardinal sins themselves, the condition of "force" would not have alleviated the severity of the original transgression.

It would seem that Rambam could make the same argument had he used the verse of "וְאֶהְבֶּתָּ" as the source of the obligation of martyrdom. However, Rambam might have found it difficult to say that one who is worshiping idolatry only because he is forced, even though internally he still believes in and loves God, is transgressing the obligation of "love of Hashem."

²¹ Alternatively, the phrase does not mean that the act must be done publicly, but only that afterwards Hashem's honor will spread throughout the nation. According to this, the severity of the cardinal sins allow for public sanctification even when one forfeits one life in private, while the less severe sins require publicity to elicit the same level of sanctification.

²² See Positive Commandment 9.

²³ See the Rambam's language: "וענין זאת המצוה אשר אנחנו מצווים לפרסם האמונה הזאת האמתית בעולם".

²⁴ See also Ramban who follows in this path.

²⁵ The logic is that there is no reason to place greater value on one's own life over somebody else's life.

²⁶ This verse is the source for the law that, in general, one should transgress a commandment rather than be killed.

²⁷ Other commandments lose their strength due to the concept of "live by them rather than die by them" and it is only because of the obligation of sanctification that in public one must forfeit one's life for them.

²⁸ Rambam could suggest that the words "בְּכָל נַפְשְׁךָ" explain only the extent of the commandment to love Hashem (even when He is to take your soul) and have nothing to do with martyrdom.

²⁹ According to him the *vav* of "וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי" might be read as setting up a contrast, "Do not profane my name, but rather I shall be sanctified".