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We recently returned from a wonderful trip to Israel. As we sat in the waiting area of the BenGurion airport terminal before the flight, we noticed a young family nearby--a husband and wife and their little children aged 12 and under. As could be expected, the children were restless and wanted to run around and play.

The mother, in a soft voice, spoke to the children: It's fine to play, but please remember: everything you do should be a "kiddush Hashem" (a sanctification of God's name). The children understood their mother's message, and they played nicely and quietly.

When we boarded the plane, we found ourselves sitting a few rows in front of this family. Throughout the long flight (11 hours or so), the children were remarkably well-behaved. They read books, spoke quietly, rested. One of the daughters, perhaps aged 9 or 10, brought a glass of water to an elderly woman who said she was thirsty. I was so impressed by the children's behavior that I complimented the parents--and the children. We struck up a conversation--and a friendship.

It struck me that these parents were doing a marvelous job raising such fine children; the secret of their success was teaching the children to remember that all their actions should sanctify God's name. They should know that they are ambassadors of God and Torah, and that their words and deeds should inspire respect from those who see them. If people know that their words and deeds should be imbued with piety and dignity, they will behave in a pious and dignified way. They will avoid unbecoming behavior, vulgar speech, immodest clothing.

Living one's life in the spirit of "kiddush Hashem" not only leads to proper behavior and speech, but also to inner courage to stand by one's principles. Instead of succumbing to conformity to the negative qualities among one's peers and society, one ultimately realizes that he/she has the strength to rise above corrosive group pressures.

This week's Torah reading includes a warning to judges: "do not be afraid of any person, because judgment is God's." A judge might be tempted to favor the rich or the powerful, or might be reluctant to issue a ruling that may prove unpopular. The Torah, therefore, reminds the judge: do not be afraid of anyone, do not let your judgment be swayed by fear. God is the ultimate Judge. You are answerable to Him.

In a sense, the Torah is instructing judges to live their lives so that their words and deeds will constitute a "kiddush Hashem". Living with the consciousness of God's presence allows one to be righteous and strong, to overcome anxieties and fears, to develop true strength of character.

The Torah's instruction to judges has application to everyone, not only judges. In our daily lives, we all have to make decisions and judgments. We are confronted by many pressures. Our judgment might easily be swayed by the desire to appease rich and powerful people, to go along with popular fashions, to conform to the patterns--even the negative patterns--of our peers. The Torah tells us: do not be afraid to stand alone, do not seek popularity and "success" at the cost of violating the principles and values of a righteous and compassionate God. Conduct life so that it will be a "kiddush Hashem", a light and inspiration to others.

The Jewish people is called upon to be "a light unto the nations". We fulfill this role by sanctifying God's name through our good deeds and respectful words, by building strong character and strong families. In sanctifying God's name, we sanctify our own lives.

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