



## HAFTARAT PARSHAT VA'ERA Returning our Hostages: Human Courage and the Sanctity of God

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In this week's reading, we encounter a profound word: "*venikdashti*" ('and I shall be sanctified'). In Neviim and Ketubim, the word appears exclusively in the book of Yechezkel, with one of its five occurrences being in our Haftarah: "When I have gathered the House of Israel from the peoples among which they have been dispersed, **and have shown Myself holy through them** in the sight of the nations" (28:25).

In every instance (20:41; 28:22; 28:25; 38:23; 39:27) the word carries the same meaning and context: God is sanctified 'through the eyes of the nations,' when the peoples of the world witness His intervention in history to redeem the Jewish people.

Indeed, we live in a time that God's intervention is seen. Thousands of missiles have been fired on us in Israel with limited loss of life and possessions. Our soldiers share with their family and friends the overt miracles they have witnessed on the battlefield.

Yet there is one other reference to "*venikdashti*" found in the Torah itself. In Sefer Vayikra (22:32) we read, "You shall not profane My holy name, that I may be sanctified in the midst of the people of Israel—I am God who sanctifies you."

Our Sages understand this verse as the source for the commandment, incumbent upon each and every one of us, to sanctify God's name. This sanctification occurs not just through divine acts of wonder, but through human commitment, as we publicly demonstrate our loyalty to God and Torah values.

This ultimate form of sanctification often requires tremendous sacrifice, even the giving of one's life when compelled to do so. Rambam codifies this approach (Yesodei Hatorah 5:1) while also explaining in other places in the Mishneh Torah that we sanctify God's name through our daily actions that honor Him and the Torah.



Upon deeper examination, Yechezkel's five instances of "*venikdashti*" also encompass human courage and responsibility. As Rabbi David Altschuler and his son, Rabbi Hillel, explain that in our Haftarah, the word "*venikdashti*" refers to the sanctification of God through our own courageous actions; the miracles that we ourselves perform (Mezudot David, Yechezkel 28:25). The soul breathed into us by God enables us to be His partner, putting our actions on par with His miracles.

We have seen this through bereaved family members, injured soldiers and the hostages who demonstrate unbelievable resilience.

Today we witness this paradigm of divine intervention. I think of Rav Ohad Teharlev, Rosh Midreshet Lindenbaum, whose soldier-son, Elhai z"l, was killed by a terrorist while guarding the city of Ofra.

Now, in an almost unbearable turn of events, his son's murderer is being released as part of the hostage deal. Yet despite this profound personal loss, Rav Teharlev expresses genuine joy for the hostages' return.

This heroism extends beyond the Teharlev family to dozens of other families who have learned that those who murdered their loved ones will be freed to secure the hostages' release. They embody the highest form of "*venikdashti*" – putting aside their personal anguish for the sake of saving lives and unifying the people.

While we may be saddened by a world in which goodness and evil seem confused, where those with blood on their hands are exchanged for innocent hostages, these families show us what it truly means to sanctify God's name.

They demonstrate that the sanctity of life and the unity of our people can transcend even the deepest personal pain. Their actions are no less divine than the miracles and wonders we have witnessed on the battlefield.

In their courage, we see both paradigms of "*venikdashti*," Hashem's hand working through human sacrifice and dedication, and that is what I will be thinking about as I listen to the Haftarah this week.

Through these heroic acts – both divine and human – we pray for the ultimate sanctification of God's name: the wondrous redemption that will be witnessed by all nations, the return of all our hostages, the end of this war, and the cessation of all our trials and tribulations.