

“WE WILL SANCTIFY YOUR NAME IN THE WORLD”:  
THE CONCEPT OF *QIDDUSH HA-SHEM* FROM BIBLICAL TO RABBINIC  
LITERATURE

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Abstract

The concept of *Qiddush ha-Shem* (the Sanctification of the Divine Name) is a fundamental value in the Jewish tradition. Seldom, however, has it been clearly defined; and only rarely are the special circumstances, in which it is used to designate specific behavior, clarified. It is frequently associated with a willingness to die for the sake of God and hence it is often understood as martyrdom. The present paper seeks to challenge this widespread view. In contrast to conventional wisdom it shows that a call to give one’s life for the sake of God is no-where mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, and only rarely can it be found in the earliest stratum of rabbinic literature. It argues that initially, in biblical times, *Qiddush ha-Shem* referred to *God’s* action, in which His power and hence sovereignty is displayed. By the Tannaitic period the concept underwent a dramatic change and it was used to label human behavior. However, it retained its basic meaning as referring to actions that express and publicly announce one’s confidence in God’s power and divinity. This indicates that God’s power and aptitude were the anxiety to which the early rabbinic concept of *Qiddush ha-Shem* was meant to be a response.