Remembrance and Oblivion of Religious Persecutions: On Sanctifying the Name of God (*Qiddush ha-Shem*) in Christian and Islamic Countries during the Middle Ages*

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*Qiddush ha-shem*—self-sacrifice for the holiness of the God of Israel and his law—is a commandment whose purpose is to glorify the name of God publicly, to the point of willingness, under certain circumstances, to sacrifice one’s life. In Jewish law and morality, *qiddush ha-shem* should be performed with maximum devotion in the presence of witnesses. The more public the act, the more valuable it becomes: declaring the unity of God and devotion to him is not worthy of being called *qiddush ha-shem* unless the declaration is made in the presence of others, be they Jews or adherents of other faiths; following Jewish law out of mere habit does not meet the special level of intent required for *qiddush ha-shem*. Proper *qiddush ha-shem* entails acting beyond the letter of the law. In daily life, it requires patterns of behavior that arouse public attention, even if the believer performs those acts in secret; in death, when the believer is offered the choice between accepting a different faith and dying, it is likewise an act that is both public and all-encompassing.

This chapter explains the behavior of converts under duress and perceptions of this behavior in collective memory. The chapter focuses on the Jews of Islamic countries, with a brief look at the experiences of forced converts in

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other regions. For this purpose, we shall outline the main approaches used to understand self-sacrifice and qiddush ha-shem as well as more general ways to understand relations between minority Jewish communities and majority society and the behavior of Jewish communities in times of crisis.

**Major Approaches**

The scholarly consensus distinguishes between Jews in Islamic countries who, forced to choose between conversion and death, are generally said to have chosen to convert, and Jews in Christian countries, who are believed to have chosen martyrdom. The assumption has been that the commitment to a single body of Jewish law and a single literary tradition created the expectation that

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