

Geulas Yisrael #98 – Acharei Mot /Kedoshim

The 3rd Kiddush Hashem

Hashem is infinite and His uncontainable presence spans the entire cosmos. Yet, His presence on this Earth is a function of human behavior. By empowering human beings with freedom of conscience and with free will, Hashem anchored His presence on Earth to human history.

In particular, Hashem entrusted His chosen people as His representatives to humanity. Actions which augment His presence constitute a kiddush Hashem and, sadly, actions which diminish His presence create a chilul Hashem. The commandment to generate a kiddush Hashem stems from the pasuk of וּנְקַדְשֵׁתִי וּנְקַדְשֵׁתִי בְּיַד בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל , a phrase which underscores the relationship between Jewish history and kiddush Hashem.

Jewish Martyrdom

Bringing Hashem into our world hasn't always been easy. Ideally, we were meant to represent Him by living in His land and modeling a godly lifestyle to an international audience. Namely, our kiddush Hashem agenda was meant to be peaceful and serene. Sadly, we wrecked that historical narrative and replaced it with a more circuitous and violent arc, which would plunge us into two exiles and thrust us into thousands of years of homelessness.

During that long dreadful odyssey, we would be fiercely challenged to uphold Hashem's presence. The Jewish faith was viciously attacked and the rising popularity of Christianity and Islam certainly corroborated antagonistic claims that Hashem had replaced us with a different nation. We faced brutal religious persecution and fell under immense pressure, both physical and psychological to convert. The cost for defiance was often death. Refusing to buckle to this ferocious pressure, we valiantly defended the divine presence with our own lives. The long trail of Jewish martyrdom is a fearsome but heroic story of a loyal nation doggedly upholding their commitments at Sinai.

The first public theological faceoff over the presence of Hashem occurred between Nevuchadnezar and three Jews who had been expatriated from Yerushalayim to Bavel. Resisting this indomitable tyrant's demand to worship his idol Chanania, Mishael, and Azaryah faced a fiery death sentence. Their defiant

stand and their miraculous escape restored Hashem's presence to a gloomy world. As they were being hurled into the fire they shouted לא לנו ה' לא לנו כי אם לשמך - תן כבוד - they were conscious that their heroism was repairing Hashem's presence during a broken period of history.

Approximately 500 years later, Rebbi Akiva and his colleagues were mercilessly and savagely murdered as they resisted the mighty Roman empire and its colossal armies. Rebbi Akiva's repeated insistence upon teaching, Torah despite stiff Roman decrees landed him in jail awaiting execution. As he was being crushed to death he recited shema Yisrael and launched two thousand years of Jewish martyrdom. Over the next two millennia, we faced furious and relentless pressure to abandon our religion and abdicate our historical mission. Following in Rabbi Akiva's legacy we courageously defended Hashem's presence by sacrificing our own lives for an invisible G-d we literally loved more than ourselves.

Kiddush Hashem Through Life

Kiddush Hashem, however, isn't only expressed through a dramatic act of martyrdom. Jews don't have a death wish and we hope to represent Hashem through the lives we lead and through the values we display. Every page of Torah studied and every mitzvah performed increases Hashem's presence, even if that amplification isn't discernable to the naked eye. Additionally, in our day-to-day behavior we model the dignity and nobility of a life lived before Hashem, showcasing the value of commandments and of historical covenant.

Moreover, by infusing our lives with ethical spirit we hope to inspire the world to higher moral ground. The gemara documents Torah sages who behaved with extraordinary moral sensitivity to avoid any defilement of Hashem's spirit. These religious figures understood that as they were associated with Hashem their behavior would be heavily scrutinized. They voluntarily returned lost items to Gentiles, were careful about their eating habits, and promptly paid their bills. Alienation from religion often stems from the inability to reconcile religion with moral instinct. When religion appears to clash with moral sensibilities it is often discarded. Witnessing religious personalities acting inappropriately disillusion people from religion.

Religious Jews have, recently, become more visible in the public eye- both in Israel and even in the United States. As religious people enter the public realm, they

must be extremely vigilant about their behavior and their speech. As public personalities associated with Judaism their behavior reflects the image of Hashem and they can raise His presence of, G-d forbid sabotage it.

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In addition to defending Hashem with our lives and to living a moral lifestyle of commandments, there is a third manner in which Hashem's presence is augmented. In perek 20, Yechezkeil describes a narrative of yetziat mitzrayin which is starkly different from the story of sefer Shemot. In his portrayal, Hashem expected us to launch our own redemption by withdrawing from our pagan habits. Sadly, decades of slavery had eroded our faith and we had descended into pagan culture. Unfortunately, we lacked the courage and the imagination to take the first leap in response to Hashem's invitation. Responding to our apathy Hashem "considered" annihilating us. Failing to fulfill historical expectations we had little right to be redeemed from slavery. This alternative narrative poses a thorny question which sefer Shemot ignores: why were we redeemed if we were undeserving?

The answer to that question is unambiguous: We were redeemed because our destruction would have reflected poorly upon Hakadosh Baruch Hu. As His chosen nation, we had been aligned with Him for the previous 400 years. To annihilate us at that delicate historical juncture would have caused a regression of the divine presence from our world. That level of Chilul Hashem could not be countenanced and, therefore, we were liberated and redeemed even though we were undeserving of His intervention.

Yechezkeil's outline of yetziat Mitzrayim profiles a third dimension of kiddush and chilul Hashem. The general "state" or condition of the Jewish people reflects upon Hashem. When we flourish, Hashem's presence is augmented. When our national condition declines Hashem's presence regresses and a chilul Hashem follows. Sometimes we are redeemed to avoid an exacerbation of chilul Hashem.

The Holocaust was the darkest period in Jewish history since the destruction of the second Mikdash. The attempt to methodically eliminate anything and everything Jewish from the streets of Europe was an assault not just on the Jewish people, but upon the presence of Hashem. For those five dark years Hashem's presence was dimmed by malicious and murderous human behavior. A chilul

Hashem of that magnitude required a kiddush Hashem to restore the grandeur of Hashem.

That kiddush Hashem occurred a mere three years afterwards. Three years in the sweep of history is a passing hiccup. Our return to our land and to historical relevance and even prominence reestablished His presence. Over the years since our state was renewed, as Israel has prospered, Hashem's presence has similarly increased. Hashem's presence is not only a product of dramatic theological religious faceoffs, or of Torah infused lives. Hashem is affected by the arc of Jewish destiny; when our national condition ascends His presence is more deeply felt.

We are living in the third dimension of kiddush Hashem. We may not have deserved redemption, but history demanded it. Hashem 'had to' respond to the atrocity of the Holocaust. The state of Israel resuscitated Jewish pride and relived Jewish suffering, but, most, importantly, renovated Hashem's glory in the world of Man.