A Complex Reality

After Moshe becomes angry at the people and hits the rock he is condemned to not enter the Land of Israel:

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Since you did not have faith in Me to sanctify Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly to the Land which I have given them."  

Moshe’s sin as identified by Hashem is a lack of sanctification of Hashem’s name (*Kiddush Hashem*). However, the reader of the Torah becomes immediately perplexed, as the very next verse declares that Hashem was indeed sanctified by this episode:

These are the waters of dispute [Mei Meribah] where the children of Israel contended with the Lord, and He was sanctified through them (*va-yekadesh bam*).

How could Moshe be punished for failing to create a *Kiddush Hashem*, if the Torah itself describes Hashem as being sanctified through the event?

The commentators split in their attempts to parse this perplexing issue. Rashi explains that Hashem’s name was not sanctified in the actual episode of the water. Rather, it was the fact that it was the fact that people as great as Moshe and Aharon, incurred such severe punishments that triggered the *Kiddush Hashem*:

For Moses and Aaron died because of them. When God judges His holy ones, He is feared and sanctified by mankind. Similarly, it says, “You are awesome, O God, because of Your holy ones” (Ps. 68:36).

Hashem’s name becomes great and fearful when the even the righteous are punished.

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1 Bamidbar 20:12
The Ramban, however, argues that the verse states that it was the episode with the water itself that created the *Kiddush Hashem*, while for Rashi it was Moshe and Aharon’s death that occurred in the future. Rather, says the Ramban, despite the fact that the various parts of the episode were executed in an imperfect fashion, a *Kiddush Hashem* still occurred due to the fact that in the end of the day the water emerged from the rock before the eyes of the entirety of the Jewish people.

The Ramban’s comments underscore an important point about *Kiddush Hashem* – it is not a zero-sum game. The Torah can simultaneously describe a certain event as both a *Kiddush Hashem* and an event that failed to properly sanctify Hashem’s name. Even while Moshe and Aharon are punished for a lack of *Kiddush Hashem*, the Torah still records that a *Kiddush Hashem* occurred.

This teaches an important lesson regarding our current stage in history. The Vilna Gaon teaches that the rebuilding of Yerushalayim is considered a significant *Kiddush Hashem* in the pre-messianic era.² What constitutes the rebuilding of Yerushalayim? Is the Yerushalayim of today that contains so much of a mixture of light and dark, good and evil, considered a *Kiddush Hashem* such that we should celebrate it?

The Ramban teaches us that the answer is neither a complete affirmation or complete denial. There are aspects of today’s Yerushalayim that are certainly not a *Kiddush Hashem* and things that we should not celebrate. However, this does not mean that a tremendous *Kiddush Hashem* is not occurring before our very eyes. We are in the middle of a process and must simultaneously recognize the amazing strides that have been made and the work that still needs to be done.

May we merit the ultimate *Kiddush Hashem* of the complete rebuilding of Yerushalayim!

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² *Kol HaTor* Chelek 2, perek 5.