

JEWISH STUDY NETWORK

Chukat

There are two stories in the Torah that talk about Moshe drawing forth water from a rock. First, in Exodus 17:6, the Torah relates how the Jewish people come to Refidim and complain about the lack of water, so Hashem tells Moshe to strike the rock to bring forth water for them. Moshe hits the rock, water comes out, and he names the place Masa U'meriva because the people fought with Hashem and tested him by saying "is Hashem with us?"

The Torah relates the second story is this week's parsha (Numbers Chapter 20). The Jewish people come to Kadesh and the water stopped coming out of the rock when Miriam died. They complain to Moshe and Aharon for water, and this time Hashem tells them not to hit the rock but rather to speak to it. When Moshe hits the rock and the water gushes forth, Hashem says to him, "Because you did not believe in Me to make me holy in front of the children of Israel, you will not bring them into the Land."

Now how would have G-d's name been sanctified had Moshe and Aharon spoken to the rock instead of hitting it? Rashi says that had they spoken to the rock, there would have been a *kiddush Hashem* (sanctification of G-d's name) because people would have said, "If this rock which does not speak or hear and does not need sustenance fulfills G-d's word, then surely we should!" They would have concluded that just as the rock listens to Hashem's command, so too they should, and this would have been a *kiddush Hashem*. This is most puzzling. The reasoning of the people seems to be totally irrational, because surely an inanimate rock, which does not have free choice, will not disobey the command of G-d. But people are completely different, since they have an inclination to do evil and disobey!

It would seem this cannot be an example of the type of tight deduction that the Talmud employs in analyzing the legalistic areas of the Torah. Rather, the Midrash means that when seeing the course of nature going exactly according to Hashem's word, the people would be struck by this and they would reflect on Hashem's involvement in the world. They would internalize the belief that G-d provides for the world and sustains man based on his actions, and therefore man must take responsibility for his actions. This would be a *kiddush Hashem*, for Hashem's providence and mastery over the world would be publicized among people.

After all, what is the real meaning of *Kiddush Hashem*? G-d's name can be sanctified when people scrupulously observe His mitzvot, which give the message to the world that there is a Creator to whom man ought to be accountable. In the most extreme of cases, the Talmud says G-d is sanctified when man gives up his life in order to not worship idols and deny G-d's mastery over the world. This is what we mean in the Shabbat prayer *Av Harachamim* in which we ask G-d to mercifully recall those martyrs "who gave up their lives for the sanctification of G-d's name." While in these examples the *kiddush Hashem* is caused by man's actions, in the story of the rock the *kiddush Hashem* would have come about through man's reactions to the events occurring around him.



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In the end of this very episode, we have another example of a *kiddush Hashem* that came about through an act of G-d and the human reaction to that act. After Moshe hit the rock and the water came out, the Torah says, “These are the waters of strife, where the Jewish people fought with Hashem and He was sanctified through them.” Rashi says (Numbers 20:13) when G-d punished Moshe and Aharon that they would not be allowed to enter the Land of Israel because of their sin here, this itself brought about a *kiddush Hashem*. Rashi further explains (on Leviticus 10:3) that when Hashem takes an exact accounting to punish righteous people, the witnesses reason that He will surely punish wicked people. This is also the type of *kiddush Hashem* which comes about not through a human being’s action, but rather from the reaction of people who see the exact justice of Hashem and thereby are driven to work harder to do mitzvot and improve their conduct in all areas.

This is seen also in the Ramban’s understanding of the above verse. Ramban argues with Rashi that the words “He was sanctified through them” refer not to the death of Moshe and Aharon, but rather to the waters themselves. But both Rashi and Ramban agree that had Moshe spoken to the rock, there would have been a *kiddush Hashem* by people seeing the water pour forth. However, that *kiddush Hashem* was not accomplished, so a different *kiddush Hashem* happened. According to Rashi, it was the *kiddush Hashem* of righteous people dying. But Ramban holds it was the water coming out via a hit to the rock. This was a smaller *kiddush Hashem* than what would have been accomplished if Moshe spoke to the rock in order to make the water come out. Both Rashi and Ramban agree that the type of *kiddush Hashem* that the Torah refers to in the story of the rock is not a *kiddush Hashem* that came about through the performance of a mitzvah, but rather through something that happened and shook people to reflect on G-d’s involvement in their lives.

Shabbat Shalom.

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