



A Sparkle in the Sky

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E25)

קידוש לבנה is a precious opportunity that, if we grasp it, can be ours every month.

Reciting קידוש לבנה at the happiest time

The timing of קידוש לבנה is discussed extensively in the Gemara and in the הלכה. The practical ruling is that קידוש לבנה must be recited during the first half of the חודש, while the לבנה is waxing (an old English word meaning to grow), before it begins to wane (diminish, which the לבנה does after it reaches its maximum, or full moon in the middle of the חודש).

However, there is another aspect of its timing which does not appear to be related to the waxing and waning of the לבנה; it preferably should be said at a time of joy, ideally מוצאי שבת or מוצאי יום כיפור.¹ On מוצאי שבת we are dressed in our finest clothing after spending the day with הקב"ה, and on מוצאי יום כיפור we are joyous at having been granted מחילה וכפרה. There is even an opinion² that one who needs to recite קידוש לבנה during the week should dress up for the occasion. And even though we are not accustomed to change for קידוש לבנה during the week,³ the message is still clear – the recitation of קידוש לבנה is to be accompanied with an elevated, joyous spirit.

It behooves us to look carefully at this ברכה so that we can be moved to dance upon its recitation as Jews have over the centuries.

Standing before the King

The Gemara⁴ discusses קידוש לבנה and gives us some hints about its significance. The first is the teaching that we recite after קידוש לבנה:

תנא דבי רבי ישמעאל: אילמלא (לא) זכו ישראל אלא להקביל פני אביהן שבשמים כל חדר וחדש - דיים. אמר אביי: הלכך נימרינהו מעומד.

In the בית מדרש of ר' ישמעאל they taught that if כלל ישראל had only one opportunity a month to receive Hashem's presence – it would suffice. Hence, said אביי, it should be recited standing.

The survivor told him that קידוש לבנה kept them going.

In keeping with the above, the Gemara reports that מרימר and מר זוטרא expended great effort to stand for קידוש לבנה. [The יד רמ"ה explains that they were elderly and stocky, and it was hard for them to stand.] Clearly, there is great significance to this ברכה.

Receiving Hashem's Presence

In one of his many Shiurim on TorahAnytime, Rav Shmuel Greenberg, שליט"א, noted that the significance of קידוש לבנה may be found in the words 'receiving Hashem's presence' quoted above. What are we 'receiving'? Surely, we mean standing before, greeting, and praising ה'. What is meant by receiving His Presence?

¹ או"ח סימן תכו:ב

² שם ברמ"א

³ עיין מ"ב שם – ועכשיו אין נוהגים לדקדק בזה

⁴ סנהדרין מב.



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Rav Greenberg suggests that the idea of receiving draws from the fact that the לבנה has no light of its own. Through the dark night it reflects the light of the unseen sun and shines a night-light onto the Earth. The central mission of כלל ישראל is like that of the לבנה. We draw our light, our קדושה, our תורה, from the רבש"ע who is unseen, and we shine that light onto the world, to other Jews and beyond.⁵

The first פסוק

Rav Greenberg applies this insight to address why the first רש"י in Chumash suggests that sanctifying the חודש, which is the first (and now we see the central) Mitzvah given to כלל ישראל, should be the opening Posuk of the Torah. The announcement must be made at the outset that the mission of כלל ישראל is like that of the לבנה. We are designed to receive קדושה from Hashem and to reflect it back into the world.

Waxing and Waning

כלל ישראל, like the לבנה, have a built-in but temporary limitation. Like the לבנה, our glory rises (imagine the courts of ע"ה and דוד המלך ע"ה and שלמה המלך ע"ה). However, when חטאים get in the way, כלל ישראל wanes. This waxing and waning from spiritual and material glory to the depths of spiritual and material poverty is a cycle that has repeated throughout our history. But we are assured that ה' will redeem us from this cycle and we, under דוד מלכות בית דוד, will be restored to glory that will not be diminished. May it be בקרוב בימינו.

This parallels the promise which Hashem gave to the לבנה. Its waxing and waning will end, and it will be restored to its full-time glory. The night is dark and seems to be endlessly long, but dawn will come, and its light will shine forever.

Yaakov and the night

This explanation helps us understand why the name יעקב is embedded into קידוש לבנה. We turn to the לבנה and bless its Creator using four terms with the acrostic of יעקב:

ברוך ויִצְרָךְ בְּרוּךְ עוֹשֶׂךָ בְּרוּךְ מְנַחֵךְ בְּרוּךְ פּוֹרְאֵךְ

יעקב אבינו is the voice of אמונה, faith and trust at night, in darkness and in גלות. He instituted גלות מצרים and he led כלל ישראל into תפילת מעריב.

And גלות and יעקב redeemed הקב"ה and we trust absolutely that He will redeem his descendants from the last גלות as well. Note the שחרית In ⁶. כי פָּדָה ה' אֶת יַעֲקֹב וּגְאָלוֹ מִיַּד תְּזַק מִמֶּנּוּ: פסוק we praise ישראל with the words הקב"ה. In מעריב, though, we add this פסוק since we refer to יעקב אבינו at nighttime. And we hint at יעקב אבינו again when we recite קידוש לבנה. The waxing and waning of the moon is a גלות phenomenon, one from which יעקב אבינו and כלל ישראל will be redeemed.

Part of a פסוק, forward and backward

It may have surprised you when reciting קידוש לבנה that we that we recite a part of a פסוק from שירת הים forward and then backward. First:⁷

תַּפְּלַעְלִיקָהֶם אֵימָתָה וְפָחַד בְּגִדְלָךְ וְזָרַעְךָ יִדְמוּ בְּאָבֶן

⁵ וכן בפסוק תהלים פד: יב - כי שָׁמַשׁ וַיִּמְגַן ה' אֱלֹקִים
⁶ ירמיהו לא: י

⁷ שמות טו: טז



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Then, we reverse the order:

כָּאָכֵן יִדְמֵנוּ זְרוּעֵךְ בְּגִדְלֵךְ וְפָחַד אֵימָתָה עֲלֵיהֶם תִּפְלֵ

Rav Elie Munk in World of Prayer explains that Hashem always brings down the enemies of כלל ישראל. Sometimes their downfall takes a natural (forward) course. But sometimes the salvation is anything but conventional. It is as if the forces of nature are being reversed.

And to you, Peace

After speaking about the downfall that we pray for our enemies, we turn to one another with Brochos. The שלום עליכם to each other is an affirmation that our Tefilos for the downfall of our enemies does not, ה"ו, apply to the beloved Jews around us. To our precious brothers we only wish שלום.

The Protective Power of קידוש לבנה

Rav Meir Schwab שליט"א, Menahel of the Bais Yaakov of Denver, shared with me a story whose central figure was his great father, Rav Shimon Schwab זצ"ל.

After celebrating the Bar Mitzvah of a grandson in Philadelphia, Rav Meir set out to bring his elderly father back to Washington Heights. As they set out Rav Schwab זצ"ל remembered that he had not yet said קידוש לבנה. He asked Rav Meir to stop the car so that he could get out. With superhuman effort (given his painful arthritis) he stood to recite קידוש לבנה.

Rav Schwab was careful to say קידוש לבנה as early in the month as possible, on the first clear night. No waiting. There was even a little German rhyme that the children knew back in

Germany which translates roughly to mean that during the winter months (טבת, שבט ואדר) we say קידוש לבנה as soon as the לבנה is visible.

When he got back into the car, Rav Schwab asked R' Meir if he had yet recited קידוש לבנה. R' Meir indicated that he had not, but that he would say it in Washington Heights when they arrived. Rav Schwab insisted that R' Meir say it then. R' Meir got out of the car and said it then.

The protection afforded by קידוש לבנה became quite apparent later in the trip. The road became increasingly slippery as they drove through the freezing rain. At the approach to the toll plaza of the George Washington Bridge the car went into a skid and spun around over the span of four lanes. At one point the car even threatened to tip over as it went up on two wheels.

When the car finally came to a stop, they realized the extent of the miracle. There was not another car in sight. They had not hit anyone and R' Meir's fears for his and his father's wellbeing did not materialize. All R' Meir remembers is hearing his father saying, 'See, I told you to say קידוש לבנה...' [As an aside, even when he was quite ill and required hospitalization, Rav Schwab requested that he be placed in a room whose direction would allow him to say קידוש לבנה...]

[The באר היטב סימן תרב:ד quotes an account of salvation associated with קידוש לבנה which is brought in the אור חדש. Robbers let him say קידוש לבנה as his 'last act' and he was miraculously redeemed from their hands. He even asserts that one need not worry about passing away that month once having said קידוש לבנה.]



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לבנה קידוש kept him going

This story, which Rav Chaim Shmuelevitz would regularly recount with great emotion, is recorded in the Sefer שיח צדיקים.

R' Chaim asked a survivor of gruesome camps how he didn't despair during those dark times. The survivor told him that קידוש לבנה kept them going.

He said that a group of them would risk everything to go out at night and recite קידוש לבנה. He was the only one who remembered the words and so they would recite it with him. Their strength came from the words:

וְלִלְבָנָה אָמַר שֶׁתְּתַחַדְשׁ. עֲטֶרֶת תְּפָאֶרֶת לְעֲמוּסֵי בְטָן שָׁהֵם
עֲתִידִים לְהִתְחַדֵּשׁ כְּמוֹתָהּ. וְלִפְאֹר לְיִוְצָרָם עַל שֵׁם כְּבוֹד מַלְכוּתוֹ:

Hashem told the לבנה to renew itself in a crown of splendor for those to whom Hashem 'gave birth' – the Jewish People – for they will be renewed like the לבנה and will glorify the majesty of הקב"ה.

This promise, Hashem's promise, kept them going. That sparkle gave them hope.

It is that sparkle that prompts the Halacha⁸ to associate קידוש לבנה with joy and dancing, like a festive Chasuna. We dance and sing out our confidence, our אמונה, that the waning of כלל ישראל will turn to endless waxing once again.

Takeaway: I will try to infuse my קידוש לבנה with a sense of joy and hope.

⁸ אור"ח שם