

DO YOU SEE ME? ZOOM AND KIDDUSH HASHEM

Dr. Mijal Bitton, Downtown Minyan

A few weeks into the pandemic, I noticed that before any Zoom meeting, I'd spend a bit too much time thinking about the bookshelves behind me and what books I wanted people to see. When I realized what I was doing, I considered that much of our lives right now have become very curated. Each of us presents ourselves through this small digital Zoom screen, and we get to show others very minimal, specific things we want them to see.

We have a concept in Jewish tradition of *Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying God's name. One way the rabbis explain this idea is that when a God-fearing person showcases positive actions, it causes others to see their actions as reflective of God's teachings and thus to love God, too (TB Yoma 86a).

This leads to a sociological experience for those seeking to sanctify God's name: living among others and having people see us as potential representatives of God helps hold us accountable, motivating us to be the best people we can be and to live up to our values. When we walk into shul, or to work, or even the supermarket, **when we know we are seen by others who see us as God's representatives, we are moved to behave closer to our better selves.**

The embodied dimension of *Kiddush Hashem* highlights one of the challenges that we have right now. Through our virtual realities, we get to curate very specific and artificial representations of ourselves and thus miss out on the opportunity to become better people since we don't feel the pressure of others' gazes inspiring us to enact a *Kiddush Hashem*.

Despite these challenges, **I believe that the concept of *Kiddush Hashem* can help us explore what it would mean to overcome the artificiality of Zoom.** What would it mean to, instead of curate, make ourselves vulnerable, to say,

"Here I am. I want to invite you to see me in my fullness and to inspire me to be a better person, the person that I want to be."

"Living among others and having people see us as potential representatives of God helps hold us accountable, motivating us to be the best people we can be."

We can invite others to see us more fully and we can make an effort to see others. **Through Zoom we can see each other's faces, but do we spend enough attention trying to really see each other fully?** Do we notice the expressions, the eyes, the smiles. Do people seem O.K.? Can we pick up the phone after a Zoom call and say, "Hey, I want to know what's really happening in your life? How can I be there for you?"

If we do this, we'll be engaging in bringing about a *Kiddush Hashem* in which we work hard to see each other, one that will inspire us to be kind, to give, and to be there for each other. **My blessing for all of us is, God willing, we will get through this time and be able to look back and be proud of the people that we've been, people who can increase the holiness in this world through our actions and by seeing each other fully.**

