

Shmini

Sober Guys Anonymous

Hashem spoke to Aaron and said: Do not drink wine or any alcohol, neither you nor your children when you enter the Tent of Meeting, neither you nor your children; this is an eternal rule – for all generations.

Vayikira 10:9

Everything bad that has ever happened in the world is the result of wine. Adam Harishon drank wine at his marriage reception, and it led him to sin.⁴⁴⁷ There would never have been death in the world otherwise. Noah drank wine, and suffered terribly as a result. He never had another child as a result of his excess. Lot was only convinced to engage in his incestuous liaisons while under the influence of alcohol. The Golden Calf was only created because the Jews had been drinking wine.⁴⁴⁸ The sons of Aaron only committed the sin that led to their fiery deaths as a result of having imbibed wine.⁴⁴⁹ The Baalei Hatosafos⁴⁵⁰ tell us that the *ben sorer umoreh* (rebellious son⁴⁵¹) is killed primarily as result of his drinking. The Ten Tribes were only exiled (and largely lost to the Jewish people) as a result of wine.⁴⁵² The use of wine would seem to have wrought more trouble than the world has been able to tolerate. If not for the influence of spirits, the world would be sin-free and death-free – wouldn't that be something! “Do not be from those who guzzle wine.”⁴⁵³ “To one who fixes his gaze on the [wine] goblet, all paths seem just,”⁴⁵⁴ are just a few of the places where Shlomo warned of the dangers of wine drinking. “There is *nothing in the world* that brings wailing to a man's life as does wine drinking!”⁴⁵⁵

“The person who drinks excessively will eventually fitter away all of his assets, and his personal effects, leaving his home bare. He will convince himself that he is justified in violating any sin, and will say terrible things without any embarrassment, for he is not in his right mind. He will

⁴⁴⁷ *Daas Zekenim* to Vaykira 10:9; see Sanhedrin 70a.

⁴⁴⁸ This assertion is made by *Daas Zekenim Mibaalei Hatosafos* to Vayikra 10:9, quoting the verse in Shemos 32:6, “The people sat, to eat and drink, and then got up to play frivolously.” See Rashi there, that this was also the cause of Chur's murder, for “frivolous play” can mean murder, sexually immoral conduct and idolatry.

⁴⁴⁹ Vaykira Rabbah 12:1. See *Midrash Talpiyos* (s.v. *yayin*), who tells us that what our Sages actually meant is that since any drink could be tasted in the Well of Miriam, they drank from that well and thought of wine. See R. Yosef Engel's *Gilyonei Hashas* to Brachos 48b, s.v. Moshe, where he deduces from the words of this *Midrash Talpiyos* that the *man* and water from the Well of Miriam actually became what the person wanted them to taste like.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ Dvarim 21:18

⁴⁵² Bereishis Rabbah 36:4, as quoted by Rashi to Bereishis 9:21.

⁴⁵³ Mishlei 23:20

⁴⁵⁴ Mishlei 23:31

⁴⁵⁵ Sanhedrin 70b

not have any control of what he is doing or saying. He will eventually bring himself to four terrible sins: idolatry, promiscuity, murder and slander. There is nothing more dangerous than wine,” teaches the Midrash.⁴⁵⁶

And yet – it’s a mitzvah to drink wine on every Shabbos and Yom Tov! In fact, the word for drinking wine at these times is Kiddush⁴⁵⁷ – for it brings holiness into one’s life and home. The Torah itself is compared to wine.⁴⁵⁸ Wine is the central part of the Seder, and one is obligated to have Pesach wine no matter how impoverished he is.⁴⁵⁹ The entire salvation of the Purim story, teaches the Book of Esther, occurred at drinking parties. We celebrate Purim with our own drinking parties. There is a special reserve of wine – the *Yayin Hameshumar*⁴⁶⁰ – that Hashem is saving for a feast in the time of the Moshiach. Yaakov brought his father, Yitzchak, wine from Gan Eden⁴⁶¹ just before he received the blessings from him. The only other place that wine is associated with goodness and blessing in the Torah is when Malkitzedek greeted Avraham with wine and bread, says *Daas Zekenim*, for in those two instances, they made blessings upon the wine.

Despite all of the places in Tanach that wine drinking is discouraged, we have just learned that if

⁴⁵⁶ Vayikra Rabbah 8

⁴⁵⁷ See *Mekor Chaim* of R. Chaim Hakohen of Aram Tzovah, student of R. Chaim Vital (*Orach Chaim* 273:4), where he discusses the mitzvah of Kiddush over wine, and how it helps correct the sin of Adam that was done with grapes.

⁴⁵⁸ Talmud Yerushalmi, Brachos 1:4; *Zohar*, vol. 1, 140a; Seder Eliyahu Zuta 13; Midrash Tanchuma, Acharei Mos 10; *Psikta diRav Kabanna* 12:5 and Yalkut Shimoni to Tehillim 19, *remez* 676, are just several examples of this common theme in Chazal. There is some question as to whether or not wine represents the Written or Oral Torah. The *Midrash Talpiyos* (“Anaf Chachamin,” s.v. Midrash) says that it refers to Oral Torah. R. Chaim Palagi, in *Yisamach Chaim* (*yod*, 35), says that according to *Zohar*, vol. 1, 140a, quoted above, it refers to the Oral Torah. The footnote in the Mizrachi ed. (Jerusalem, 2002) questions this, for the *Zohar* merely says that “wine and milk are the Written and Oral Torah” and wonders where R. Chaim Palagi saw anything in the *Zohar* to cause him assume that the *Zohar* is different from the *Midrash Talpiyos*. R. Ashlag, in his *Pirush HaSulam* to the *Zohar*, says that milk represents the Oral Torah, and wine, the Written Torah – thus bringing the *Zohar* in line with the opinion of the *Midrash Talpiyos*. The answer to the question raised in the footnote may lie in that fact that R. Chaim Palagi, earlier in *Yisamach Chaim* (*ches*, 49), quotes the very same *Zohar* to assert that milk represents the Oral Torah! It may be that his edition of the *Zohar* simply said that wine and milk are the Oral Torah, never mentioning the Written Torah at all! Interesting to note is that many commentaries understood the *Zohar* to mean that milk represents Written Torah, and wine, the Oral Torah, such as R. Avraham Azulai (1570–1643, grandfather of Chida) in his *Zobarei Chama*, the great Moroccan kabbalist R. Shalom Buzaglo (1700–1780) in his *Mikdash Melech*, R. Yaakov Tzvi Yalish (1778–1825, author of the more famous *M’lo Haroim*) in his work *Kehilas Yaakov* on *Zohar* (although he suggests the opposite, i.e., milk=Oral, wine=Written, as well; see also his *Kehilas Yaakov* on Chumash, where he elaborates), and R. Yitzchak Isaac Yehuda Yechiel Safrin of Komarno (1806–1874) in his *Zohar Chai*. (For more on the significance of milk as the Oral Torah, see *Sfas Emes* to Parshas Maasei, as well as *Landscapes of the Spirit* by R. Abba Tzvi Naiman, pp. 141–5.)

⁴⁵⁹ Pesachim 99b

⁴⁶⁰ Brachos 34b, Sanhedrin 99a

⁴⁶¹ *Daas Zekenim Mibaalei Hatsofos* to Bereishis 27:25

a blessing is recited, it can then be an exercise in goodness and bring blessing! Additionally, we are taught in the Gemara⁴⁶² that one who can remain intellectually calm despite his imbibing of wine is in some way as great as the seventy elders of the times of Moshe, for the *gematria* of the word *yayin* (wine) is seventy.⁴⁶³ The Gemara there even asserts that this calm man is even similar to G-d, as well! It is thus clear that drinking is not frowned upon in and of itself. Drinking can either be an incredible spiritual experience, or a devastating physical one.

When a man is on his way to be put to death by a Beis Din, he is given a cup of wine with a pinch of frankincense mixed in,⁴⁶⁴ so that he will not feel the pain as acutely.⁴⁶⁵ In the relatively obscure but very important work *Menoras Hamaor* by R. Yisrael Alankavah, the author writes, “When a man makes the Kiddush over a cup of wine, he pauses after the word *savri*, and the other people assembled there call out, ‘L’Chaim’⁴⁶⁶ [to life!], and then he makes the blessing. When a man is taken out to his death and given a cup of wine, he pauses after the word *savri* and the other people assembled there call out ‘*L’Misa*’ [to death!].” What an unusual ritual. Certainly, calling out L’Chaim before drinking the Kiddush wine on Shabbos strikes us as a lovely custom. But to call out “to death” to the man about to be killed – what is that all about?

In fact, there are several reasons given for the custom to call out L’Chaim at Kiddush. One of them, given by the Rav David Abudraham,⁴⁶⁷ is that since one who is taken out to be killed is given wine, we wish to emphasize that this wine is not, Heaven forbid, a harbinger of death, but, in fact, it will bring life! He also suggests that since the Tree of Knowledge that Adam ate from was (according to some opinions) a grape tree, and that sin brought death into the world, we say L’Chaim! Others⁴⁶⁸ say that it is because Noah drank wine, and brought curses into the world – for, his grandson Canaan and his descendants were cursed by Hashem as a direct result of that incident – we wish to bring life and goodness into the world through our drinking, so we say L’Chaim. A fourth reason, of the *Daas Zekenim*,⁴⁶⁹ is based upon *Daas Zekenim*’s opinion that Adam’s sin was a result of his having imbibed wine at his marriage ceremony to Chava, and this led him to a sin that brought death to the world. This is why, says the *Daas Zekenim*, we say L’Chaim. All of these reasons are fascinating, for they teach us that our response to the failure of others to act nobly in their inebriation should not be to shun wine. We still drink it – but we do so with an extra dose of care, for we know that this exercise can potentially go awry.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶² Eruvin 65a

⁴⁶³ See Rashi there, s.v. *yatz’a sod*. See also Tosafos to Sanhedrin 38a, s.v. *nichnas yayin*.

⁴⁶⁴ Sanhedrin 43a

⁴⁶⁵ Commentary of R. Menachem Meiri (*Beis Habechira*), ad loc.

⁴⁶⁶ See Midrash Tanchuma to Pikudei, and *Tikkunei Zohar* 24 (69a)

⁴⁶⁷ *Sefer Abudraham* to the *Arvis* prayer of Shabbos. This answer also appears in the *Likkutei Tshuvos Hageonim*, published at the end of the *Sefer Kolbo*; see *Beis Aaron* (R. Aaron Maged), vol. 11, p. 605.

⁴⁶⁸ Maharam Metz quoted in *Bayis Chadash* to *Tur Orach Chaim*, 176

⁴⁶⁹ Vayikra 10:9

⁴⁷⁰ There are other reasons given to say “L’Chaim” at Kiddush time. The Abudraham

The prophet Malachi told of a time when the Jews return to Hashem. Then, he tells us, “The vine will not *tishakel* for you.”⁴⁷¹ The commentaries⁴⁷² there explain that *tishakel* is a word that is used when one loses children.⁴⁷³ Here, that term is borrowed to mean that the vine will not cast its fruit off in the field. The vine will not lose its children for you. The great Turkish scholar Rabbi Avraham Palagi⁴⁷⁴ offers another interpretation. Noah was castrated by his son Ham,⁴⁷⁵ when Ham caught him drunk. There were no more children born of Noah as a result of his carelessness. It was Noah’s misuse of the vine that caused him to lose any future children that he would have had. Malachi was ushering in an era when we will not misuse our vines, and thus, “the vine will not *tishakel* – cause a loss of children – for you!” Wine can cause us to lose future generations. However, it is worth noting that when a boy from a good family marries a girl whose father is a Torah scholar, their union is like wine made from grapes mingled with other grapes from the vine; whereas if he were to marry a girl whose father was a simpleton, it would be like wine made of grapes from the vine mingled with grapes from a thorn bush.⁴⁷⁶ Children can be like the finest wine, and abuse of wine can cause the loss of children. Malachi talked of an era when we would not lose children because of our wine abuse. To the contrary – our children will then be the finest vintages, from grafts of the purest, finest vines.

What is the meaning of all of this? Why is wine so important, and why is its misuse so egregious an offense?

Wine is the essence of physical pleasure. But wine drinking is quite different from partaking of every other foods and drink. Wine changes the drinker. *Daas Zekenim*⁴⁷⁷ explains, in fact, that the reason that the Aramaic word for wine is *chamar* is because the *gematria* of *chamar* adds up to 248, the number of bones in the human body,⁴⁷⁸ for it seeps into and influences every bone in

(*ibid.*) and Chida (*Birkei Yosef* 176) both offer another explanation, which translates the Aramaic “*L’chayez*” as no more than “I agree,” as it is often used in the Gemara, and understand that after *savri*, it was the custom for everyone to call out, “I agree.”

⁴⁷¹ Malachi 3:11

⁴⁷² *Metzudas David*

⁴⁷³ Rashi to Bereishis 27:45: “One who buries his child is called a *shakul*.”

⁴⁷⁴ *Avraham Anochi*, vol. 2, p. 53b.

⁴⁷⁵ According to the late R. Shlomo Wolbe (*Shiurei Chumash Mipi Maran Hamashgiach*, Jerusalem, 2008, p. 66), this was not physical castration, but rather, he rendered Noah unable to reproduce through the power of his gaze!

⁴⁷⁶ Pesachim 49a

⁴⁷⁷ Vayikra 10:9

⁴⁷⁸ Traditionally, the Rabbis of the Talmud categorized the limbs of a person into 248 distinct limbs, which correspond to the 248 positive mitzvahs. See Makkos 23b. Interestingly, Bechoros 45a says that women have not 248, but 252 limbs. (Rambam in *Hilchos Tumas Mes* says 251, which is troubling to some *mefarshim*; Tosafos in Sukah 27b says that women have 248, and this is also questioned by many. In the work *Ali Tamar* on Yerushalmi (Sotah 5:1), R. Yissachar Tamar has a method of explaining that the limbs of a woman can be counted in more than one way, and that perhaps it is the case that spiritually she has 252, and physically,

one's body. Sweet honey or refreshing milk do not change the personality of the person, but a few cups of wine can. "Your love is better than wine."⁴⁷⁹ Wine has the ability to bring out the inside of a person. The drunk is freer than the sober man. He says things that he would otherwise bottle up inside. "As the wine enters, the secrets exit."⁴⁸⁰ When we drink wine, we recognize the ability of the physical elements in this world to bring out spiritual feelings from inside of us. But they can also bring out destructive, base feelings as well. The incredible challenge of the physical world is that we may fail! Wine comes along with potential for grave danger – that is what makes its proper use a challenge. We elevate our spiritual Shabbos through delightful food, and delicious drink. And wine. Man is charged to drink wine – to engage in life. There are so many things in life that are difficult and challenging. It is not easy to support a family, or raise children. It is not easy to spend our lives working, shopping and paying bills. But engaging in the world in the appropriate way will make us far better people than those who wander the deserts and cloister themselves on mountains and in monasteries. Drinking wine, and engaging life, are, indeed, enormous challenges fraught with danger, but the potential benefits are so great that we have no choice but to grab the bull by the horns, and do our very, very best.

248. Chida (*Dvash Lifi, Aalef*, 9) explains that 248 plus 252 is 500, which is the same *gematria* as *pru urevu* (be fruitful and multiply), the result of man and wife coming together. Also, to fulfill that mitzvah, a person must have a son and daughter, which is 500 *avarim* in all! Chida, in his *Nachal Kedumin* (Bereishis, *siman* 24), also says that "*chassan kallal*" is 513, which is 248 and 252 plus *echad*, which means "one" (and whose *gematria* is 13) – man and woman coming together. R Shlomo Kluger (*Haelef Licha Shlomo Orach Chaim*, 120) explains that the opinions that say that on women, too, ought to pray for their 248 limbs can be explained, since blessing comes to a woman through the conduit of her husband (Brachos 51b), and he can only protect her and pray for her in areas that he, himself shares with her. See also *Minchas Elazar* 2:28, that a woman should say *Kel Melech neeman* to make the Shema 248 words long, despite the fact that she does not have precisely 248 limbs, and see *Rivavos Efraim* 1:56 about this.

⁴⁷⁹ Shir Hashirim 1:2

⁴⁸⁰ Sanhedrin 38a