



## The Wonders of Wine

By Rav Paysach Krohn shlita (Shiur E8)

***What makes wine so precious that it is considered sacred? Why is there no sacred Jewish moment without wine, including the Shabbos table? What about alcohol abuse?***

### *The distinction of wine*

Wine. The word elicits associations. Some associate wine with the fine tastes of connoisseurs who forfeit precious resources of time and money as they search for the perfect wine. Others think of wine as an escape from their reality via an intoxicating beverage, with all that implies.

But we associate wine with the most sacred rituals in our lives. We cannot imagine a wedding without wine under the Chuppah (in fact, there are two cups of wine under the Chuppah, one marking the Kiddushin and one for the Sheva Brochos) or naming a baby at his bris without holding a cup of wine. And few would consider a Shabbos table complete without wine.

Wine is a symbol of joy, as the Posuk<sup>1</sup> teaches *וַיֵּיזֶן יְשׁמַח לְבַב אָנוּשׁ* – wine brings joy to the hearts of mankind. (Indeed, when joy is restrained, as in times of personal or national grieving, we also refrain from wine.) The רד"ק comments on this verse that drinking wine in proper measure even enhances one's ability to reason.

### *The paradox of wine*

We have one of many paradoxes in Jewish life. That which is profoundly good can also be bad. The same wine that elevates a sacred moment and even enhances one's capacity for thinking is the same wine that can and has destroyed countless lives through its abuse. It has made wise the hearts of some and has turned great people into fools.

*With wine we recognize and celebrate the potential that is inherent in every human being.*

The Torah tells us that the righteous Noah, who was saved from the destruction that befell the world owing to his righteousness, slipped from his lofty level because of wine.<sup>2</sup> As well, one of the opinions in the Gemara<sup>3</sup> identifies the vine as the forbidden fruit that אדם and חווה ate in Gan Eden. Wine is truly the finest and worst beverage.

### *The special characteristic of wine*

Wine is transformative. On its most basic level wine is no different than the other extracts from fruit. If you squeeze an orange, you will have orange juice and if you squeeze an apple you will have apple juice. But those extracts are just a part of the original. They have no distinction of their own. This is evidenced by the fact that

<sup>1</sup> תהלים קד: טו

<sup>2</sup> בראשית ט: כ-כא

<sup>3</sup> ברכות מ.



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the Brocha recited over any of those extracts is a step down. The Brocha over fruit is העץ while the Brocha over that which is extracted from that fruit is שהכל. It steps down from a more distinguished Brocha to a more general, less special Brocha.

Not so with wine. The grape is העץ, but its extract is the precious wine which gets a Brocha of distinction. The extract is a step up from its source. It has been transformed. Like flour which has been elevated by our turning it into bread, the grape has been elevated by our turning it into wine. That transformation unleashes the potential that was contained in the grape. With wine we recognize and celebrate the potential that is inherent in every human being. Wine symbolizes the finest that is within us. But if that power is not harnessed then the wine will release the base instincts that lie in us and its destructive capacity must be recognized, as well.

### *The potential of two*

Wine does not only release the capacity that is potential in a person; it symbolizes the potential that is hidden in a union. We hold a cup of wine under the Chuppah and thereby symbolically bless the couple that the potential in their union should be released and revealed.

### *May the juice be sweeter than the fruit*

The Gemara<sup>4</sup> refers to a proper union between two people who are dedicated to Hashem's Torah as ענבי הגפן בענבי הגפן דבר נאה ומתקבל – the fruits of the vine joining the fruits of the vine is a pleasing union. Why the choice of wine as the

symbol of a good Shidduch? Because we look forward to the new union to be even greater than their original vines. The couple has the capacity to unleash potential that was perhaps not seen in their parents. Let them be greater, ever greater, just as fine wine gets better and better. The connoisseur looks for the better wine, but he is forgetting that wine is but a symbol of the sacred potential that we are looking to unleash. Do not spend your time bringing out a better wine; invest in bringing out more of the spiritual potential that is unlocked in a person and in a union.

Similarly, at a bris, we hold a cup of wine while we pray and ask Hashem that זה הקטן גדול יהיה – this little fellow is but a lovable bundle of potential. The cup of wine symbolizes our prayer that the meaning and spiritual mission of this new life be revealed in the world. Wine is a symbol and an expression of the capacity to become more than it started out being.

### *The wedding of Shabbos*

It is fitting, therefore, that we should hold a cup of wine as we bring in the Shabbos. On one level, the entry of Shabbos marks the union between the כנסת ישראל and the Shabbos. And so, we raise a cup as we would at a Chasuna.

But the symbol of the wine is that we are stepping up and revealing the sacred capacity that is hidden in time. Our transition from the secular six days to the sacred seventh day must be recognized as going from the grape to the wine, from the mundane to the sublime. When we unleash the sacred essence contained in time

<sup>4</sup> פסחים מט.



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called Shabbos, it is fitting that we hold up a cup of wine. We remind ourselves that a person who lives on the plain of the grape all his life will never experience the greatness of wine. One who recognizes the step up reaches for wine.<sup>5</sup>

### *Teshuva and wine*

Perhaps our raising a cup of wine in celebration of man's capacity to transform and elevate himself is a form of תשובה. In this case, we are atoning for that first sin. Instead of using the fruit of the vine to debase ourselves and descend into our base instincts we are holding up the cup of wine celebrating elevation and transcendence. Shabbos is here and time has become sanctified.

***Takeaway: I will try to recognize wine as a powerful symbol of what can go wrong and all that can go right.***

Perhaps this significance of the wine of Kiddush is built into the fact that the word שבת hints at the word שב – return. And it would connect us with the Midrash that says that when אדם הראשון discovered the power of Teshuva he sang out מזמור שיר ליום השבת.

To understand the cup of wine is to understand the power of transcendence (the sanctity of time), of joining כנסת ישראל with the Shabbos (the Chasuna), repair and return (the שב of שבת), of stepping up exactly where one had previously slipped down – the essence of wine.

Good Shabbos, L'Chaim and Welcome back.

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<sup>5</sup> ed note: it is interesting that Challah can be used for Kiddush as well. Bread, like wine, is a symbol of the step up, in this case from the plain grain to the

sublime bread, as the continuation of our original Posuk reads – ולהם לבב אנוש יסעד.