

SOMETHING TO WINE ABOUT

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Friday Night:

G-d told Moshe, "Speak to the Children of Israel, and tell them about when a man's wife ... (Bamidbar 5:11-12)

The next words of this posuk are, "and deceives him," which of course begin the section dealing with the 'Sotah' -- the Suspected Adulteress. The fact that this mitzvah literally pops up out of nowhere, after the counting and responsibility of the Levites implies a strong conceptual connection between the two. Thus, rather than focus on the negative here, we are going to discuss the positive.

The Midrash writes:

The generations are only redeemed in the merit of the righteous women of the generation, as it says, "He remembers His kindness and faith for the House of Israel ..." (Tehillim 95:9). It doesn't say, 'Children of Israel,' but, 'House of Israel' ... (Midrash Zuta Rus 4:8)

And, how true it has been. After Chava got it wrong in the Garden of Eden, she got it right through Sarah, Avraham's wife. It was Sarah who saw the potential spiritual damage Yishmael could cause Yitzchak, and pleaded with Avraham to send him away. He did, but only after G-d put His foot, so-to-speak, down next to Sarah's.

Perhaps one of the most fateful corners the Jewish people have ever turned was under the guidance of Rivkah, Sarah's successor. It was Rivkah who brilliantly engineered the coup-de-grace which snatched the blessings out of the evil hands of Eisav and onto the head of Ya'akov. Of course, it would never have worked had Divine Providence not been with her as well.

And, in her wake came Rachel and Leah. Again, it was the husband, Ya'akov Avinu, who took a back seat to the machinations of righteous women who were bent on contributing to and building up the Jewish nation.

Later, in Egypt, says Rebi Akiva, it was in the merit of the righteous women of that generation that we left Egypt (Shemos Rabbah 1:12). It was they he worked so hard to propagate the Jewish people in spite of the harshness of Paroah's decrees, and how bleak the Jewish future looked. And, of course, we cannot forget little Miriam, who risked her life to watch out for her brother -- baby Moshe -- and

future redeemer of the Jewish people.

And, last week, on Shavuot, we read about Rus, the great grandmother of Dovid HaMelech. Did she know, as she stood there on the border of Eretz Yisroel and Moav, how much of world history depended upon her decision to remain Jewish? Did she know, as she watched her sister Oprah turn HER back and forsake her mother-in-law, Naomi, how critical it was for the future and final redemption of the Jewish people, that she not do the same thing?

To think that the entire future of the Jewish people hung in mid-air over the heads of two women out there in the middle of no-man's-land, with no one watching, save for the Master of the Universe and His entire Heavenly Court!

What does the name 'Rus' mean? Rebi Yochanan said: She merited that Dovid should descend from her who would sing (shirayuhu) songs and praises to The Holy One, Blessed is He. (Brochos 7b)

Well, it's not exactly a tight fit. There is a 'raish' and 'vav' in the word 'shirayuhu,' as there is in 'Rus,' but the Talmud has made better connections before. However, the letter connection is really secondary, for, Rebi Yochanan is really focussing on the thematic connection between Rus and redemption, which can apply to all women as well.

It was the Levi'im who sang those songs and praises of Dovid HaMelech for The Holy One, Blessed is He, on the steps of the Temple and as part of the sacrificial service. And, as we have pointed out on numerous occasions, it was Dovid's descendant, Chizkiah HaMelech's LACK OF songs and praises for The Holy One, Blessed is He that stopped him short of being that Moshiach and ushering in that Final Redemption (Sanhedrin 94a).

In fact, the concept of 'Malchus' in Kabbalah is feminine, as embodied in the day of Shabbos, which is considered feminine. The king may be male, and his power may be quite masculine, but, the defining role of 'Malchus' is clearly feminine, and that is to bind together all the factors of any kingdom, be it on a family level or a national level, into one, perfect, cohesive unit.

And, though song and praise not only results in harmony, more importantly, harmony results in song and praise. This we saw in the 'Song of the Sea,' when the Jewish people were lifted into a spiritual state by the miraculous splitting of the sea that resulted in 'Shirah' -- song of the soul -- and the ultimate connection to G-d, the goal of the Levi'im as well.

More than it is for a man, it is a woman's unique ability to put aside the trappings of the physical world, and be self-sacrificing for the unity of herself, her family, her community, and the world. This is why it was the men, and not the women, who fell prey to the seduction of the golden calf and its worshippers. In this tremendous ability, she resembles the Levi'im and the entire purpose of the Temple service.

Thus, when a woman acts immodestly, or worst, adulterously, then she has not only violated halachah, she has violated her *raison d'ETre*. Thus, she is brought to the Temple, which resembles

the 'kosher home' she is supposed to build, and is dealt with by the Kohanim, with whom she is supposed to share a spiritual affiliation.

Thus it is:

The generations are only redeemed in the merit of the righteous women of the generation.

For it is the women of any society that possess the key to re-unite the Jewish people with their Father-in-Heaven, through modesty, devotion, and loyalty, to G-d, to their families, and perhaps, most important of all, to themselves.

Shabbos Day:

G-d told Moshe, "When either a man or a woman vows to become a nazir, abstaining in honor of G-d, he must abstain from wine ... (Bamidbar 6:1-3)

As Rashi points, wine is the bad guy. The Nazir is someone who just happened to be passing through the Temple when an episode of Sotah was taking place, which, he knew came to be because of wine. As the expression goes, "When wine goes in, secrets go out," and that can even include allowing oneself to be intimate with forbidden people, G-d forbid.

After all, it was wine that got Noach into the trouble in which he found himself (Bereishis 10:21), which cost him the opportunity to have more children. And why stop there? Says the Talmud:

Rav Chisda said in the name of Rav Ukva (according to some, Mar Ukva) who said in the name of Rebi Zakkai: The Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Noach, "You should not have imitated Adam HaRishon, who was damaged by wine." This is similar to the opinion that says that the tree from which Adam HaRishon ate was a vine, as it says in a brisa: Rebi Meir says that the tree from which Adam HaRishon ate was a vine, for, nothing brings a person to confusion more than wine. (Sanhedrin 70a)

(Incidentally, this interesting piece of Talmud is at the bottom of folio page '70,' the numerical of the Hebrew word for wine.)

Thus, wine seems to be the primordial bad guy, which would help us to understand why it is used for so many mitzvos, such as Kiddush, or, making the blessing at a Bris, or, when 'bentching' after a meal. We are, in using wine for 'Kos shel Brochah' (Cup of Blessing), trying to help wine get back on the right track. Maybe that is why using sweet wine for Kiddush is such an issue.

On the same page, but higher up, the Talmud records:

Rav Chanan said: Wine was only created to comfort the mourners and to give reward to the evil in

This World ... It reddens their faces in This World, but, whitens their faces in the World-to-Come ...
(Sanhedrin 70a)

Yet, in all fairness to wine, we have the following:

Anyone who becomes settled through wine has the knowledge (da'as) of his Creator ... has the knowledge (da'as) of the Seventy Elders; wine was given with seventy letters (Rashi: the gematria of yai'in -- wine -- is 70), and the mystery (of Torah) was given with seventy letters (sod -- mystery -- also equals 70). When wine goes in, secrets go out. (Eiruvim 65a)

Talk about extremes!

Perhaps the following Talmudic account explains the variance of opinions regarding this primeval beverage:

Why are the words of Torah compared to three liquids: water, wine and milk? ... This is to teach you that, just as these three liquids are best kept in ordinary utensils, such as wood or earthenware, so too is the Torah best contained by those who possess a humble spirit. The daughter of Caesar once said to Rebi Yehoshua ben Chananyah, "Such an ugly vessel and such glorious wisdom!" He told her, "My daughter, in what does the king, your father keep his best wine?" "In earthenware containers," she answered him. "The commoners keep their wine in earthenware containers," He told her, "Shall your father do so also?" "In what should they be kept?" she asked him innocently. "You who are wealthy," Rebi Yehoshua remarked, "should keep it in silver or gold containers!" She told her father, who then commanded that all his wine be kept in containers of silver and gold. Consequently it became sour, and when the Caesar was informed of this, he asked his daughter, "Who told you to do this?" "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah," she told him. The king sent for Rebi Yehoshua ben Chananyah, and asked him, "Why did you give her such advice?" "This was the answer to her question." (Ta'anis 7a)

So, it seems that the issue is not so much the wine, but who is doing the imbibing. And, the Arizal is 'Aitz Chaim' explains why.

Before the chet of Adam HaRishon, the world was perfect. Well, almost perfect, for, there remained one place within creation where evil was still possible: the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Even the meat that Adam HaRishon ate (that's right, Adam HaRishon ate MEAT in the Garden of Eden; Sanhedrin 59b), came to him from Heaven, symbolic of its Heavenly purity and perfection.

However, wine, Adam had to strain for himself. This was indicative of the level of involvement necessary of Adam to become a partner with G-d in bringing creation to the final stage of perfection. It also made wine representative of the only substance in physical creation still subject to the light of 'Gevuros,' which is the basis of 'hester panim,' the 'hiding of G-d's face.'

And, not only does the 'light' of Gevuros 'mask' the light of G-d, but, in doing so, it makes possible free-will and the potential to sin. 'Straining' the wine of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil (like

the binding of Yitzchak -- Gevuros -- by Avraham -- Chesed) was symbolic of 'taming' the light of 'Gevuros,' of 'sweetening' it, which is what we do every time we abstain from sin. Doing so is the basis of one's reward in the World-to-Come.

Continued next d'var Torah ...

SEUDAH SHLISHI:

(Continuation of SHABBOS DAY)

The entire period he is a nazir he must eat nothing made from [fruit of the] vine, from the kernels or even the husk. (Bamidbar 6:4)

Thus, when rather than subdue the force of Gevuros, Adam was subdued by it, not only did he not perfect the last remaining imperfections within creation, but, he even reversed the perfection of such things as meat. Hence, as a result, just as we were expected to strain our own wine prior to the sin, so, too, are we expected to prepare our own meat (through ritual slaughter and salting), as part of the 'sweetening' process of the light of Gevuros. Thus explains the Arizal and the Leshem Shevo v'Achlamah.

Back to the Nazir. The Sotah was a victim of Gevuros. She may have had too much wine to drink, which may have led to a loosening of her standard of modesty, but ultimately, it was the Gevuros -- that negative force within creation that we may refer to as the yetzer hara -- that overcame her and her partner in immorality and their sense of right, which brought them to do wrong.

In Kabbalah, they are called 'Chitzonios' (Externalities) or 'K'lipos' (Peels), to make it clear that they are as far away from the center of holiness as something can get. They are what 'hounded' Adam HaRishon, says the Leshem, after he began to intellectually 'investigate' the evil potential of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. They changed his way of thinking, putrefied his thoughts, and made eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, against the will of G-d, an inevitability.

They do the same to us every time we are in the vicinity of sin.

This is why, explains the Nefesh HaChaim, the adulteress woman is the symbol of heretical thinking. In Eichah (Lamentations), which we read on Tisha B'Av, that infamous day of national mourning, Yirmiyahu compares the exiled Jewish people to a woman of ill-repute, because they entertained ways of thinking and beliefs foreign to Torah.

The Nazir could easily be any clear-thinking, G-d-fearing individual who happened to be in a position to watch the self-destruction of someone who has sinned against G-d. The wine itself can be the symbol of the power within creation to seduce a man into immoral behavior, and thus, a strong reminder of the necessity of what the 'Mesilos Yesharim' refers to as 'watchfulness' against sin.

Abstaining from wine in the physical sense is outlined in this week's parshah. However, conceptually-speaking, it is the process by which one analyzes his life -- does a 'Cheshbon HaNefesh,' a 'Soul-Accounting' -- to determine his own spiritual vulnerabilities -- the areas in life where he has opened himself up to the power of Gevuros, Chitzonios, and K'lipos.

Only when one has spiritually fortified himself in an environment of holiness can the damaging effects of wine be neutralized. (According to the B'nei Yissachar, Noach did not even drink enough to become drunk! He mistakenly drank in an unholy environment, which made him vulnerable to the Chitzonios.) It is to such an environment that Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah referred when answering the Caesar's daughter.

If we only understood how true all of this is, and how, by not taking this message to heart, we have allowed ourselves at this late stage of history to become 'victims' of the force of Gevuros, and unwitting pawns in the hands of the Chitzonios. We would do well to become 'nazirim,' if not in physical actuality (without the Temple, we do not make such vows), at least conceptually.

MELAVE MALKAH:

History And Beyond: Part One

As a result of questions I have received, both in writing and during lecture tours, the following will be a mini-series that will focus on what we know about the end of history, and beyond.

Most people have heard of the 'After-Life.' As this simple but descriptive term implies, history as we know may not be all that there is, and, that whatever may follow is probably very different from what we are used to experiencing now.

Of course, from a Torah perspective, it is obvious: there is 'Olam HaZeh' -- 'This World' -- and 'Olam HaBah' -- the 'World-to-Come' -- two VERY different periods of history. In fact, according to the rabbis, This World is likened to a 'corridor,' and, the World-to-Come is compared to the 'main event' (Pirkei Avos 4:16).

However, as we will discuss, b"H, the transition from This World to the Next World is not sudden, like the flicking of switch. Rather, there are transitional periods, each acting as part of an elevation process and spiritual threshold to ready us for the ultimate union with G-d Himself, as much as is possible -- the purpose of all of existence. All of it.

Six Sefiros, Six Days, Six Millennia

The first thing to know, which flies in the face of science, and which creates a sense of urgency is that history will only last six thousand years:

For six thousand years the world will exist, and for one [thousand years] it will be destroyed.

(Sanhedrin 97a)

That is, history as we know it, which we call 'This World.' And, even though there is an opinion that disregards this Talmudic dictum, it is universally accepted by all other commentators of note, and, is considered fact by Kabbalah, which is where it counts the most.

This is because the six millennia are based upon the six days of creation, which is hinted to in the following posuk:

For one thousand years in Your [G-d's] eyes are but a day that has passed. (Tehillim 90:4)

-- which, in turn, are spiritually rooted in the six Sefiros: Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, and Yesod:

.. This is why so much time must transpire from the time of creation until the time of the tikun (i.e., Moshiach's coming): all the forces of Gevuros are rooted in the six Sefiros -- Chesed, Gevurah, Tifferes, Netzach, Hod, Yesod -- which are the six days of creation and also the six thousand years of history that the world will exist. And within them (the six Sefiros) are the roots of all that will happen from the six days of creation until the Final Tikun ... We find that all that transpires is the result of the sparks from the time of Tohu ... (Drushei Olam HaTohu 2:151b)

This is why events happen in history as they do, when they do. Just like physical DNA determines so much of our direction in life, so, too, does spiritual DNA bias the direction of history for that particular millennium. 'Chesed' gave men long lives for the first one-thousand years, though they didn't deserve it; 'Gevurah' brought Divine justice down hard on mankind in the second millennium, and, 'Tifferes' made Torah possible in the third millennium, etc.

We are now in the year 5761 from creation (2001 CE), 239 years until Year 6000, and the end of 'Olam HaZeh,' or, 'This World.' This represents slightly less than four percent of all of history as we are used to it. However, though this information in and of itself may not create any sense of urgency, as we will find out next week, b"H, a lot is meant to happen within this remaining thin slice of time, part of which is already affecting the direction of events around the world, and, particularly for the Jewish people.

Have a great Shabbos,
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