

# A SOBERING LESSON

*by Rabbi Berel Wein*

The deleterious effects of alcohol abuse are clearly evident in this week's parsha. Noach, after the trauma of the great flood and the destruction of his society and world, somehow drowns his sorrows in wine and becomes drunk and loses control over himself. From that incident, further tragedies, curses and disasters arise until it seems that the entire exercise of the flood seems to have been purposeless and irrelevant.

The scourge of alcohol related tragedies that was for many years almost unknown in the Jewish world is today commonplace in our society. Binge drinking by kippah-wearing youths is now an accepted way of life in the Diaspora and here in Israel as well. If one has any doubts about the effects of such behavior on family life, employment success and social interactions, let him spend five minutes speaking to Dr. Abraham Twerski. He will quickly disabuse (no pun intended) you of such a fanciful untrue notion. Automobile fatalities, broken families and homes and marriages, violent behavior and an attitude of uncontrolled hedonism all are products of the vineyard of Noach.

Because of this alarming situation in the Jewish world there are now synagogues that ban any form of liquor except for kiddush wine from being served or located on its premises. The excuses of Purim and Simchat Torah may have been valid for previous generations of sober minded Jews. In a generation of over indulgence and uncontrolled materialism, such as ours resembles, alcohol has become lethal to Jewish life, behavior and values.

There is a wonderfully true and pithy Yiddish aphorism that states: "What a sober person has on one's lung (controlled within) a drunken person has on one's tongue (exhibits in one's outside behavior.)" I knew Jews who when drunk on Purim would pour their hearts out to God and recite the entire Yom Kippur services by heart. Others who were great scholars would repeat countless sections of the Mishnah by pure memory.

When wine enters then the inner secrets of a person are revealed is certainly a correct assessment. Therefore I was mightily disturbed when on the night after Simchat Torah "religious" Jews who were visibly drunk went on a stone-throwing binge at passing cars here in Jerusalem. No matter what type of dress they wore on the outside, their true inner selves was revealed to be one of hatred, violence and vandalism. By such behavior, Jews can revert back to be Sons of Noach instead of Sons of Avraham.

I think that Noach's failure to realize the inevitable consequences of his drunkenness is one of the

saddest narratives in the Torah. We will meet another incident of the dangers of an alcoholic binge in the story of Lot and his daughters. There too, as in the case of Noach, future generations of history are affected negatively by the drunken behavior of an ancestor.

I therefore think that the story of Noach in this week's parsha is most relevant to us and our times. To ignore that lesson is truly to place ourselves personally and society-wise in a very dangerous and unfortunate position.

Shabat shalom.

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