

NCSY Torah _____
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DRINKING ON PURIM

*INFO FOR TEENS AND PARENTS FROM
THE ORTHODOX UNION AND NCSY*

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ALTERNATIVES

Let's Talk About Booze

It's very Jewish to break out the booze, isn't it? Every happy occasion calls for a *l'chaim*. Every Shabbos and Yom Tov is welcomed in and escorted out with wine. And who hasn't said morning Kiddush over schnapps? Or *havdalah* over beer, in a pinch? Clearly, enjoying alcohol is a very Jewish thing to do, right? Wrong!

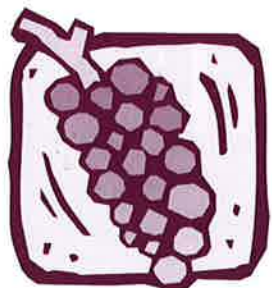
Certainly, wine has a particular sacramental value. But its use is hardly a religious imperative and there are enough conflicting reasons to make one seriously consider the many viable alternatives.

Wine or Wine Not?

Mankind's first recorded encounter with wine didn't go so well. The Torah tells us (*Bereishis* 9:20), "Noach planted a vineyard... and he drank the wine, got drunk and uncovered himself."

At the beginning of his *parsha*, Noach is described as an *ish tzaddik*, a righteous man. In all the world, only Noach and his family were worthy of being saved from the devastation of the flood. This is clearly a pretty significant individual

we're talking about. But how does Noach's story end? He gets drunk and embarrasses himself. Nobody,



If we don't indulge on Purim, how will we fulfill Rava's opinion? (See "*But Aren't We Supposed to...*" below.) Well, first of all, it's not so clear cut that Rava's opinion needs fulfilling. (Refer to the Ran cited there, and others.) If you really feel you must, here are two non-alcoholic options:

1) According to some *poskim*, taking a nap fulfills the concept of not knowing the difference between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai." If you're sleeping, you certainly don't know anything about either Haman or Mordechai!

2) The *gematria* (numerical value) of the phrase "Arur Haman" ("Cursed is Haman") is 502. The *gematria* of "Baruch Mordechai" ("Blessed is Mordechai") is also 502. Try to work it out

no matter how great, is immune to the effects of alcohol.

A famous Midrash on this section (*Yalkut Shimoni, Noah 61*) describes the effects of wine on a person, using the analogy of different animals (appropriate for Noach!). When a person starts out drinking wine, he feels as innocent as a lamb and as complacent as a sheep. After he's had a few, he feels as if he's strong like a lion. When he's gone too far, he becomes like a pig, wallowing in his own filth. When drunk, he is like a monkey. He thinks he's smart, witty and clever, when in reality he is a buffoon, being laughed at by others for his idiocy.

Here are some other thoughts *Chazal* (our Sages) expressed about wine:

- Rebbi said: there are two things that cannot coexist: wine and the service of Hashem. (*Zohar Chadash, Noah 22b*)
- What was the tree from which Adam ate? Rabbi Meir said, it was the grapevine, because nothing brings grief into this world like wine. (*Brachos 40a*)
- It is impossible to serve G-d with silliness, irreverence, and drunkenness. (*Rambam, Hilchos Yom Tov 6:20*)

But Aren't We "Supposed" to Drink on Purim?

Many people cite the famous statement of Rava in the Talmud (*Megilla 7b*) that one should drink on Purim until one can't tell the difference between "Cursed

yourself. Make a mistake? Arguably, one can fulfill this concept simply by being bad at math!

So what can we do on Purim if we're not drinking? Here are a number of alternatives (some of which are *mitzvos* and must be done anyway!):

Hear the Megilla (twice – once in the evening and once in the day) • Give *matanos l'evyonim* (gifts of money to the needy) • Give *mishloach manos* (gifts of food to friends) • Eat *mishloach manos* • Cook the Purim *seudah* • Eat the Purim *seudah* • Sing • Wear a costume • Perform acts of *chesed* (kindness) • Write a Purim *shpiel* (humorous play) • Perform in a Purim *shpiel* • Watch a Purim *shpiel* • Collect money for *tzedaka* • Write and sing *gramen* (humorous lyrical poems) • Go to an NCSY program • Take a nap • Go to *mincha*

You'll find that there's lots more you can do, intoxicating-substance free, if you put your mind to it!

is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai." Fewer people relate the incident that is described immediately after:

One year, Rabbah hosted Rav Zeira for the Purim *seudah* (the festive meal). They overdid the drinking and got drunk. Rabbah got so drunk that he cut Rav Zeira's throat, mortally wounding him. Rabbah prayed and Rav Zeira recuperated.

The following year, Rabbah asked Rav Zeira if he would like to join him for Purim *seudah* again. Rav Zeira wisely declined. When Rabbah asked why, Rav Zeira responded, "One cannot rely on a miracle happening a second time."



What an odd story! And why is it recounted at this particular point in the Talmud?

Some opinions (such as the Ran) say that this story is brought specifically to refute Rava's opinion about drinking on Purim.

The Maharsha explains that Rabbah did not literally slit Rav Zeira's throat. Rather, he kept plying Rav Zeira with drinks until he became sick, which is just as dangerous. Rav Zeira's refusal to return the following year was to avoid an environment conducive to over-indulgence, a potentially fatal situation.

We see that alcohol can place one in a variety of dangerous situations, ranging from alcohol poisoning to foolhardy behavior. (This could come in the form of a knife to the throat or an impaired driver at the wheel.) If you get behind the wheel after having even a few, you could G-d forbid accomplish what Haman failed to do: destroying a Jew! Rav Zeira's advice is the best advice: Just don't go there. (See "Alternatives" above.)

Overcompensation

You'll notice that we've only been talking about (a) Purim and (b) wine. That's because that's the only holiday/beverage combination that even needs addressing. There is no concept of ever "having" to drink vodka, beer or scotch, or of "needing" to drink on Simchas Torah. Anyone who thinks there are any such religious obligations is kidding himself. (What about wine on Pesach? See "Breaking News!" on the other side.)

SOME TORAH REASONS NOT TO DRINK

- We are required to guard our lives and our health. No one would object to your refraining from an addictive substance that impairs your judgment!
- *Dina d'malchuta dina* – one is obligated by *halacha* (Jewish law) to follow to the laws of the land. Therefore, it is forbidden for minors to violate legal age limits on alcohol consumption.
- It is forbidden to *daven* while under the influence of alcohol.

What's Really Important

"Your love is more delightful than wine" (*Shir HaShirim* 1:2). According to the Sforno, Hashem gave us the Torah and *mitzvos* with His love. These are more precious than wine which may make one feel good, but is merely a worldly pleasure.

The joy of wine is not at all like the joy of Torah and *mitzvos*! When wine leaves a person, sorrow immediately enters his heart.... This is not the case with Torah, which is the pleasure and joy of mankind both in This World and in the Next World. (*Midrash Tanchuma, Parshas Shemini*)


Being a Friend

Did you ever hear the saying "friends don't let friends drive drunk?" Judaism has a *mitzvah* that's worded very similarly. The Torah tells us (*Vayikra* 19:16), "You must not stand idly by your friend's blood." In other words, if another person is in danger, we must try to save him, even from himself. This could entail taking someone's car keys away or stopping them from drinking more when they've had enough already.



The Talmud tells us (*Shevuot* 39a) that *kol Yisroel areivim zeh bazeh*, all Jews are interconnected. Others places (including Rashi on *Vayikra* 26:37) render it "*kol Yisroel areivim zeh lazeh*," all Jews are responsible for one another. No matter how you slice it, everyone's actions affect everyone else and we have a responsibility to watch out for each other.

Breaking News!

A non-alcoholic version of wine is now widely available! It's called "grape juice" and it can be used as a wine substitute for Kiddush, at the Seder and in other situations where one might otherwise use wine! Grape juice is available in a wide selection of varieties, including red, white, sparkling, peach-flavored, *mevushal*, *non-mevushal* and many more at supermarkets nationwide! Ask for it by name! (Make sure you look for the  or some other reliable *kashrus* symbol!)

For more information, visit the NCSY Drug and Alcohol Information Center online at www.ncsy.org