

A MITZVA DILEMMA FOR THE SHABBOS TABLE



THE FIRE

By Rabbi Yitzi Weiner

We know that there is a mitzvah to eliminate all of our chametz. Nowadays one way that we get rid of our chametz is by selling the chametz to a non-Jew. It's important for us to realize that the sale of the chametz is a real sale and it is not a game or a joke.

This leads us to the following story.

Yaakov owned a kosher grocery store. Over Pesach, he kept all of his chametz inventory in a separate warehouse near his store.

One Pesach, as usual, Yaakov sold all of the chametz in his store and looked forward to spending the Yom Tov with his family.



FROM RAGS TO RICHES

This Saturday night immediately after Shabbos Jews across the world will be sitting down with their family and friends at the Seder table. One of the mitzvos we will perform is the mitzvah of Magid in which we will discuss our exodus from Egypt.

There are many mitzvos that require speaking and reciting such as prayer, reading of Hallel, reading the Megillah and others. One can fulfill their obligation when reciting the necessary reading in Hebrew even if they do not understand the translation of what they heard or read. The mitzvah of Magid, however, is distinct from these other recitations. Magid must be done in the common language. If one does not understand Hebrew, they must read the translation.

Why is this mitzvah different from all the other mitzvos of the whole year?

Rabbeinu Bachya in the Chovos Halvavos explains that it is not sufficient for the Jew to fulfill the mitzvos alone. All of his heart and mind must be engaged in addition to his actions. The reason for this, he explains is because of the tremendous chesed Ha-Shem performs for us on a continuous basis in spite of our being unworthy. Rabbeinu Bachya dedicates a complete section of his work describing in great detail many of those infinite kindnesses. At the beginning of this section he explains why people fail to recognize these kindnesses. He draws a parallel to two people who were saved by a magnanimous benefactor. The first was an infant that was found in a basket, who was apparently abandoned by his parents. Our benefactor took up the infant, cared for him, provided for him and raised him until he was a mature independent individual. The second person our benefactor saved was a businessman who was kidnapped by terrorists and was threatened to be killed. Our benefactor heard about his plight and arranged ransom to be paid and the businessman was released.

On the second day of Pesach, someone came urgently knocking on his door. There was a small fire in the warehouse where he kept all of his chametz. The fire department was called and they were on their way. All of the chametz merchandise was worth a lot of money and a fire would be a severe financial hardship for Yaakov.

Yaakov ran to the warehouse to survey the damage. As he ran, he davened to Hashem with great fervor, that the fire should not spread too much and destroy much of his merchandise.

But as he was davening he caught himself. Is he allowed to daven to Hashem that the chametz does not get damaged? If he does that he would be demonstrating openly that he sees himself as the owner of the chametz and that it was not a real sale?

Perhaps he was not allowed to daven that the chametz be spared.

But on the other hand, perhaps he was allowed to daven. He sold it legitimately and he hoped to buy it back. That was why he was davening.

This question was brought to Rav Zilberstein.

What do you think? May Yaakov daven that the chametz in his warehouse not get burned?

See Chashukei Chemed Pesachim 213



“ A little boy went out to play hide-and-seek with his friends. He went out to hide, but all of his friends left and he found himself alone. He ran crying to his grandfather and told him what happened. His grandfather started crying, too. He told his grandson: That is exactly how Hashem feels. Because He too is hiding, and no-one is looking for Him. ”



Rabbeinu Bachya points out that the businessman will have a much deeper sense of gratitude to the benefactor than the child, in spite of the fact that the child received much more than the businessman. The reason for this is because the child grew up with this kindness from the first moment of his infancy. He therefore takes everything he gets for granted. Even once he matures and looks back, he still lacks that deeper appreciation.

Pesach marks the birth of our people. The prophet Yechezkal depicts our exodus as an infant freshly born with nobody to care for it. We were wallowing in our blood and HaShem took us up, cared for us and raised us until we were grown and mature. We are that infant and HaShem is that benefactor. There was no future for us and we could hope for nothing. HaShem swooped down and elevated us to become the eternal people who carry His Presence. Is there any parallel to such kindness?

This is the story upon which our relationship with HaShem rests.

We must spend a lifetime deepening that debt of gratitude towards Him and filling that debt with the acceptance of His Will. We must pass this on to our children so that they too should recognize their debt and fill it with their acceptance of His Will as well. The only way for us to fully appreciate His kindness is by making a celebration. Invite our family and friends, rejoice and talk about the wonderful kindness of our Benefactor. Reflect on where we were and what we have become! It is not a ritual of recitation, it is not even an exercise of remembering. It is a celebration. We must create an experience out of this event. Our Seder must become a memory that our children will never forget.

This is why our Seder is designed in a way that engages the children and the other participants. HaShem wants us to be involved.

The reason this mitzvah is different than all other mitzvos is because this is the mitzvah that engages us and brings to a new level of commitment to HaShem for the kindness He did, for the kindness He does and for the kindness He continues to do.

Have a wonderful Shabbos Hagadol and a very successful Seder.

Paysach Diskind



SHABBOS: CELEBRATING HASHEM'S CREATION

WINE & ALCOHOL

There is a mitzvah to drink four cups of wine on Pesach. How is wine made? Why are some wines red and some white? Why is some wine bubbly? And why does wine make us feel good, as well as make us feel tired and uninhibited? Let's take a deeper look at it together.

Red wine is made from the pulp of red or black grapes. In red wine, fermentation occurs together with the grape skins, which give the wine its color. However white wine is made by fermenting grape juice without the skins. Basically, red wine and white wine can come from the same grapes, only red wine is fermented with the red skin in it and white wine has the skin removed.

What causes the grape juice to turn to alcohol? To begin the fermentation process, yeast may be added to the pulp. Sometimes winemakers use the ambient yeast on the grapes or in the air. During fermentation, which takes between one to two weeks, yeast converts and breaks down the molecules of the sugar into new molecules of ethanol and carbon dioxide (CO₂). The CO₂ is then released into the air.

Sometimes, however, as in the case of champagne, winemakers want the CO₂ to stay in the wine. They then add yeast and sugar to the wine in a closed environment. As the yeast eats the sugar it releases carbon dioxide. Since the extra carbon dioxide has nowhere to go, it pressurizes the container and carbonates the wine.

Why does wine make you feel tipsy and drunk? This is a fascinating process. When you drink wine, your body sees alcohol as a poison and your body wants to break it down to get rid of it. This is where the liver comes in. Your liver uses enzymes to convert alcohol into a number of different chemicals to allow your body to break it down. First, the liver uses an enzyme called alcohol dehydrogenase to convert the alcohol into acetaldehyde. This is then broken down into acetic acid, which is then broken down into fatty acids, carbon dioxide or water, all of which the body likes. Think about it. The liver takes a poison and breaks it down to its component parts and converts it into fatty acids, carbon dioxide or water.

This is all well and good if the liver can keep up. The liver can break down about an ounce of alcohol in an hour. However, if you drink more than your liver can process this makes your blood-alcohol level rise. This surplus ethanol shoots on through to every part of the body and ends up in the brain within five minutes. This gives us the feeling of drunkenness. Here is how this works. Alcohol affects the brain's neurotransmitters', the chemicals in the brain which carry messages to other parts of the body and tell it what to do. Alcohol makes these neurotrans-

mitters go a bit haywire.

There are two basic types of neurotransmitters. The first is "excitatory impulses", which tell us to do things and are carried by **glutamate**. The second is "inhibitory signals" which tell us to do less, and they travel via gamma-aminobutyric acid, or **Gaba**. Glutamate is like the "gas pedal" and Gaba is like a "brake". Ethanol binds to glutamate and does not allow the glutamate to become active. This makes the brain slower to respond to stimuli. Ethanol also binds to gaba and gaba receptors making the person feel calm and sleepy so the brain's function slows even further. Essentially the ethanol slows the parts of your brain that make it communicate and it increases the parts of your brain that slow it down.

However, this slowing down has a euphoric effect as well. Ethanol also jacks up the release of dopamine, exciting the part of the brain that perceives reward. Some scientists think this is because the ethanol shuts down the enzymes that limit dopamine down. The result is more dopamine. In addition, it also mimics dopamine by binding to dopamine receptors and you get the euphoria, and the reward effect that the dopamine is so well known for.

What are the external effects of these chemical changes in your brain? When the concentration of alcohol begins to increase in your bloodstream and alcohol stimulates the release of dopamine and serotonin, the "feel-good" hormones, you'll start to feel good. You might feel happy, more social, confident and less inhibited. As you get more drunk, you'll start to experience more physical symptoms. This happens because alcohol depresses your central nervous system and interferes with your brain's communication pathways, which affects how your brain processes information. Your reactions are poor. You become less inhibited and you are tempted to take more risks than you usually would take. This causes symptoms like slurred speech, loss of coordination, blurred vision and dizziness. A number of processes slow down. You get a reduction in your executive function, judgment and your decision-making. This also affects the motor skills like how we use our arms, legs and hands.

Too much ethanol (around four bottles of wine) basically slows the brain down so much that it fails to send crucial signals to the body, like those that control breathing and heart rate. The "brakes" are held down too long. People die from alcohol poisoning because they pass out and the brain doesn't remind their bodies to breathe. In this case, one has the potential for going into a coma or death as a result of compromised respiration and circulation, motor responses, and reflexes.

l'Chayim!

WHEN I REMEMBER WHAT PLEASURE AND JOY IT WILL CAUSE RAV ELAZAR SHACH WHEN I GIVE HIM AN ANSWER, I GATHER UP THE VERY LAST OF MY ENERGY TO CONTINUE THE STRUGGLE

Rav Elazar Shach once spoke about the joy he got from hearing a shiur from the Brisker Rav, Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik. "The Brisker Rav's words of Torah were so brilliant and brought so much joy! I remember once, I left his home so happy — I met a certain talmid chacham, and in my great joy I told him that indeed I don't know if I deserve Olam haba, but if I do have some reward coming to me, I have just received it in the form of the joy I experienced from the chiddush I heard from the Brisker Rav."

A Talmid of the Brisker Rav once shared the following related anecdote: We were once sitting in the Brisker Rav's home, engaged in a Torah debate, when Rav Elazar Shach walked in. The Brisker Rav turned to him right away and presented an answer to a question he had been struggling with for several days. Sometime later I asked the Brisker Rav 'If he had been dealing with the subject for several days, why had he not shared the answer with us? Why did he wait until Rav Shach arrived to say it?'

"It was only right that I tell Reb Leizer first", answered The Brisker Rav. "And why so?" "Often, I am involved in a difficult sugyah and wrestle with it for a long time. It gets to the point where I feel I cannot continue. I have no more strength left to deal with it. But when I remember what pleasure and joy it will cause Reb Leizer when I give him an answer, I gather up the very last of my energy to continue the struggle. Since this is the case, he is the one who deserves to hear the chiddush first!"
It was his joy that was responsible for the chidush.

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Pictured: Rav Elazar Shach (top), and the Brisker Rav (bottom)



THE ANSWER

Regarding last week's question about whether a firstborn inherits a double portion of the chometz that was sold, Rav Zilberstein cites the Shoel U'meishiv that he does inherit it, because in some respects it was considered in the father's possession. However Rav Elyashiv felt that this was a difficult psak, so Rav Zilberstein leaves it with a "Tzarich Iyun", requiring further study.

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