

Parsha Encounters

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Parshas Vayeitzei - Dr. Shlomo Adler

To Sleep: Perchance to Dream or Fire Insurance

In the beginning of this week's Torah portion, we read that Yaakov ob"m, the third of our forefathers, "encountered the place (Mount Moriah) and over-nighted there because the sun had set; he took from the stones of the place and put them around his head and lay down in that place."

Rashi, cites the midrash (Bereishis Rabbah) which states that it was only then that Yaakov lay down for a night's sleep. He now hoped to receive a prophetic communication from Hashem (Pirkei Torah, Rabbi M. Gifter page 93, 1992). Not once during the previous fourteen years did Yaakov permit himself a night's sleep -- even one that might have led to a prophetic revelation. Yaakov dedicated those years of his life, in toto, to Torah study in the Yeshiva of Shem and Eber (Noah's son and great-grandson). Without those years of selfless dedication to limud haTorah, (even to the extent of sleep privation), Yaakov could not have ascended to the spiritual heights he attained, entitling him to receive the incredible vision recorded in this week's parasha, and to father the twelve tribes.

Rambam (Maimonides) in his magnum opus on halacha (Jewish law), Yad Hachazaka (section: laws of Torah Learning, chapter 3 #13), states: "Although it is a commandment to study Torah both during the day and at night, a person can acquire the greater part of his wisdom only at night. Thus, one who wishes to merit the crown of Torah should be scrupulous with all his nights -- not to waste even one of them with sleeping, eating, drinking, talking and similar activities. Rather, nighttime ought to be devoted to Torah study and (pursuit of) words of wisdom. The Rabbis stated that the Song of Torah can only be heard (to its fullest) at night as is stated, "Arise, sing out in the night" (Eicha 2:19). And each one who is engaged in Torah at night will have the thread of grace drawn upon him by day... and any house in which words of Torah are not heard by night- fire will consume it (him)..."

We are informed in Brachos 3b, that King David ob"m, according to one opinion, slept only in short spurts (depending on the interpretation 3 1/3 to about 30 minutes at a time) part of the night and slept not at all at night according to another.

The Talmud (Eiruvin 92a) is the source of the aforementioned statement quoted from Rambam that a house devoid of the sounds of nighttime Torah Song will be consumed by fire. According to Rashi, the fire is the fire of gehinom. The Talmud supports this striking, if not frightening, declaration with two verses, one from Yoel 2:5 and the other from Iyov 20:21. From the above it would seem, not only meritorious, but downright prudent to study Torah to the fullest especially at night. The long winter evenings are particularly suited to, and may well have been designed for, nocturnal Torah pursuits.

Although not the topic of discussion, excessive sleep is to be condemned and should not be part of any Jew's lifestyle. Indeed, even secular thinkers have written on the 'waste' of sleep to excess:

"For is there aught in sleep can charm the wise?

To lie in dead oblivion, losing half the fleeting moments of too short—life, --

Total extinction of the enlightened soul..."
(James Thomson 1700s)

Let us resolve (without accepting a vow) to increase the time we spend nightly in Torah study- even if it be only a few additional minutes. Friday and Saturday evenings should not escape this commitment (it would be a sad commentary on our understanding of the sanctity of the Sabbath if they did).

May the reward for our Torah learning include the return of the Jewish nation to Mount Moriah in its full glory.

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Halacha Encounters

Wine Substitutes

Rabbi Dovid Greenberg

Chazal ordained that Kiddush and havdala be recited over a cup of wine. What should one do if wine is not available or if one can't drink it? (Note- for the purposes of this article, grape juice is to be considered as wine.) Let us discuss the alternatives.

Bread

The Gemara (Psachim 106b) relates "Whenever Rav had a preference for bread, he made Kiddush over it." There is an argument amongst the Rishonim as to the explanation of this passage. The Rambam (Hilchos Shabbos 29:9) understood from here that one may use bread or wine for Kiddush, whatever is his preference. Others perceived the case of the Gemara as when one mistakenly washes one's hands for bread before Kiddush (presumably due to his desire at the moment for bread). In order not to have a break between the washing and eating through the bracha on the wine, one may say "hamotzi" and then make Kiddush over the bread. Rabbeinu Tam, however, states that one may never say Kiddush over bread. (For his approach to the gemara, see Tosfos there.)

The Rema, (Orach Chaim 272:9), therefore paskens that preferably one should not make Kiddush on bread, in deference to Rabbeinu Tam. If one doesn't have wine or can't drink it, he may use bread. So far we have been discussing Kiddush by night. The daytime Kiddush, which consists of only a bracha on the food, would not be noticeable as Kiddush if one were to use bread. Hence, in the absence of wine, "chamar medina" is preferable. By havdala, all agree one may not use bread (296:2). The difference being that Kiddush was instituted for saying before a meal, therefore bread has a special significance. In contrast, havdalah is not connected at all to eating. (MB ibid s.k. 7)

Chamar Medina- definition

The Gemara (Pesachim 107a) tells us how Ameimar was visiting out of town and there was no wine to be found for havdala. His hosts offered him beer and he acquiesced stating, "Since this is chamar medina (the wine of the province) one may use it for havdala." The Rishonim differ in what constitutes a lack of wine, to allow another drink to take its place. Some say there must be no wine available in the city, while others hold that as long as there are no vineyards in the vicinity, other drinks may become chamar medina. The Mishna Brura (272 sk24) paskens like the first view; hence even if the wine in town is extremely expensive, one may not use another beverage. It is clear from the poskim that in order to be classified as a "wine," the drink must be of a social nature that is widely used. As Rav Moshe Feinstein categorizes it (Orach Chaim vol.2 s75) all drinks that one would turn down if offered due to lack of thirst, are not chamar medina. In practice, when one is using chamar medina, whiskey, liquor and beer are acceptable. Water is not. Tea, coffee, milk,

soda and juice are the subject of debate. For a final psak one should ask his Rav.

When may one use it?

There is an argument amongst the Rishonim if one may make Kiddush with chamar medina. The Rambam rules that one cannot (Hilchos Shabbos 29:17) while the Rosh allows it. The Mishna Brura (ibid s.k.27) states that at night, one should try very hard to make Kiddush on wine or at least bread, for the decision regarding chamar medina is not clear. As mentioned previously, for the daytime Kiddush, chamar medina is preferable to bread. Everyone agrees that one may make havdalah with it.

The Minhag

The poskim mention that many people, even great gedolim, have made Kiddush during the day on beer or schnapps. This requires inquiry for according to what we learned, as long as wine is available in the city, a substitute is not acceptable. Many answers have been put forth. Some are:

(1) Since Kiddush by day is entirely of Rabbinic origin and the wine then was very expensive, there was room for leniency. (Taz 272:6)

(2) We mentioned earlier an opinion that when there are no vineyards in the city, a substitute may be used. Coupled with the fact that you'll also be making "hamotzi" on bread which could also be Kiddush, they found a basis to permit it. (M.A. 272:9 acc. to the M"HS)

(3) The whole concept regarding chamar medina is based on the fact that most people, if they could, would drink wine as their regular social drink. In more recent times, even with the availability of wine, people prefer other drinks. Henceforth, one may use chamar medina even in the presence of wine. (Shevet HaLevi vol.3 s.26)

All these sources agree that one should always use wine if possible.

The Shiur

The Mishna Brura (ibid s.k. 30) states, even when one is using whiskey, he must use a cup that can hold a reviis (approximately 3 oz) and he must drink at least a cheekful (approximately 1.6 oz). There is a custom that people make Kiddush using a one ounce shot glass. The source for this is based on the Taz (210:1) who states that though most drinks only require an after blessing when a reviis was consumed, schnapps is different since most people are satisfied with less. The Magen Avrohom (190:4) argues that the Rabbis didn't differentiate between different foods and drinks and everything has the standard shiur. The Mishna Brura paskens like the Magen Avrohom, however there are many, especially in chassidish circles, whose custom is like the Taz (see S.T. Har Tzvi O.C. s.159).

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