

# You Booze, You Lose

PARSHA INSIGHTS - NOACH (5759)

## ADAM'S WINE AND NOACH'S WINE

After Noach exited the ark and Hashem made a covenant with him regarding the continuance of humankind, He became busy with an interesting project. “Noach started to be a man of the soil, and he planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine (which came from the grapes he had planted in the vineyard) and became intoxicated, and he uncovered himself inside his tent” (9:20-21). Another way to translate the beginning of the *pasuk* [verse] is found in *Rashi*, based on the *Midrash Rabba*. The word “*vayochel*” [“he started”], resembles the word “*chulin*” or “*chilul*”, profanity or lack of sanctity. “Noach, the man of the earth, DESECRATED HIMSELF and planted a vineyard.” *Rashi* explains that the act of planting a vineyard **first** is not looked upon with favor. Noach should have been busy with other trees at the start, but his desire for wine compelled him to prioritize the vineyard. I once heard that Noach was horrified by the utter desolation he found in the world after the deluge. Consequently, he utilized wine to calm himself and to help him come to grips with the way things were. These might have been noble intentions. However, the tragic outcome, his drunkenness and the rest of the episode, teaches us a lesson about alcohol.

Does this wine incident bring back any recent memories? Do you realize that the fruit illegally consumed by Adam and Chava was that of the vine, according to one opinion? This shows a striking parallel between Adam and Noach. They both erred with wine. Let us explore the words of the sages, which elucidate this matter.

In the *Talmud*, the *Gemara Sanhedrin* 70A at the bottom, the Oral Torah records a dialogue between Hashem and Noach after he stumbled with wine. Noach is called “*ish ha’adama*” [man of the earth], in our *pasuk*. *Rashi* elaborates: This title is not just a nickname for Noach. Rather, Hashem was reprimanding Noach that he should have taken a lesson from the original “man of the earth”, “*ish ha’adama*”, who was Adam himself. (Notice that the name אָדָם “Adam” is like the word for earth, אֶרֶץ “*adama*”). “Noach, shouldn’t you have taken a lesson from Adam (the first ‘*ish ha’adama*’)? Wine is what caused HIS calamity!” The *Gemara* remarks that **this is according to Rabbi Meir’s opinion, that the *aitz hada’as* [tree of knowledge], was actually a vine**. Shortly, we will explore the other opinions regarding the *aitz hada’as*.

The *Gemara Sanhedrin* 70A-B continues to talk about the view of Rabbi Meir. He maintains that the tree of knowledge was a vine, since “nothing brings wailing (lamenting, weeping) to people as wine does.” *Rashi* says that it therefore makes sense that the *aitz hada’as* was a vine, from which wine is derived. Its forbidden consumption brought mortality and crying to the world, the punitive measures given after Adam and Chava ate of it. This Talmudic discussion is found also in *Brachos* 40A. There, the *Gemara* actually cites Noach’s catastrophe, his intoxication, as a main proof that wine leads to disaster. This is to reinforce Rabbi Meir’s view that Adam must have ingested fruit of the VINE and been punished for it.



Since we have brought up this topic, we will review the other opinions about the *aitz hada’as* before returning to the matter at hand.

Rabbi Yehuda holds it was wheat, since “a child does not know how to call ‘*Abba*’ [father] and ‘*Ima*’ [mother] until he tastes the taste of grain.” *Rashi* explains: The ability to address parents by their titles indicates some level of intellectual maturity. It therefore stands to reason, according to Rabbi Yehuda, that the tree of “*da’as*” [knowledge], was wheat. Just as a baby becomes capable of calling “*Abba*” and “*Ima*” only after consuming grain, Adam and Chava only gained a new type of intelligence after eating the wheat of the *aitz hada’as*.

Rabbi Nechemia declares that the tree of knowledge was a fig tree. What is his proof? After Adam and Chava became cognizant of their appearance, the Torah says that “they sewed FIG LEAVES together and made themselves loin cloths” (*Beraishis* [Genesis] 3:7). This shows that the prohibited fruit they had eaten must have been figs. How so? The *Aitz Yosef* on *Brachos* 40A refers to a *Midrash Rabba*: This is analogous to a prince who committed an immoral act with a certain maidservant. When the king heard, he expelled his son from the palace. The prince wandered from one maidservant’s house to the next, seeking shelter and comfort. Not one of them

allowed him to enter. However, that one woman with whom the prince had the affair did receive him. It was the same with Adam. When he ate from the *aitz hada'as*, Hashem planned to send him out of *Gan Aiden* [the Garden of Eden]. He went from one tree to the next (requesting leaves to sew garments), but none of them accepted him. The trees were saying about him, "This is someone who tried to deceive his Creator!" (This means that he sinned, acting as if he could conceal his iniquity from Hashem.) But the fig tree, from whose fruit he had eaten (according to Rabbi Nechemia), "opened her doors and received him." That is why Adam and Chava constructed clothes of fig leaves. *Aitz Yosef* clarifies: the Torah's emphasis of their choice of fig leaves is to prove that all the other species of trees had rejected Adam and Chava. It must therefore be that they had some "friendship" with the fig tree, namely that it was the one from which they had eaten. This is similar to that one maidservant who did allow the prince to enter.

The *Aitz Yosef* helps us understand Rabbi Nechemia better. How can the *Midrash* claim that the trees from which Adam requested clothing material refused to help? Do trees possess the faculty of speech? Are they able to refuse human demands? Actually, the meaning is as follows. Adam perceived that he had committed a grievous transgression. He realized that he deserved no assistance from any trees of *Gan Aiden*. He had originally been given access to all of them, but he knew this situation would change now. The fig tree, however, was an exception. Adam had formed a "relationship" with her by consuming her fruit, albeit illegally. This is similar to the above-mentioned prince who was taken in only by the very woman with whom he had his relationship. As a result, the fig tree was "not a stranger" to Adam and Chava. It is for this exact reason, proclaims Rabbi Nechemia, that the first couple utilized fig leaves for their clothes. The Torah stresses this point to prove that figs were the fruits of the *aitz hada'as*.

We see that there are at least three opinions about the tree of knowledge. Rabbi Meir holds it was a vine, Rabbi Yehuda maintains it was wheat, and Rabbi Nechemia feels it was a fig tree. There is much to learn from all of them.



Recall that our main point today was the approach of Rabbi Meir. Both Adam and Noach stumbled with wine.

The *aitz hada'as* was a vine, according to Rabbi Meir. Just as Adam had erred with this type of tree, Noach made wine his priority after exiting the ark. That is the meaning of the above-mentioned *Gemara Sanhedrin*, that Hashem reprimanded Noach for not learning a lesson from Adam. It becomes obvious that we must examine the misdeeds of our ancestors in order to derive relevant *mussar* [ethical lessons] from them. While always looking for the positive, promoting optimism, and judging others favorably, we should sometimes reflect on our ancestors' sins in order not to repeat them. This is one reason, our rabbis explain, that the Torah records the (relatively minor) mistakes of towering spiritual giants such as the forefathers. It reminds us to learn from them, which Noach failed to do. If we keep this in mind, our own spiritual accomplishments will be increased and enhanced.

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