YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Student summaries of sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Noach**

**Sicha of HarAV Baruch gigi**

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Dedicated in memory of Rabbi Jack Sable *z”l* and Ambassador Yehuda Avner *z”l*,
by Debbie and David Sable

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**Man of the Earth or Man of God?[[1]](#footnote-1)\***

Translated by David Strauss

**Introduction**

Immediately after the renewal of the covenant between Noach and God, and after Noach emerges from the ark, the Torah records the following incident:

And Noach the man of the earth began, and planted a vineyard. And he drank of the wine, and became drunk; and he was uncovered within his tent. (*Bereishit* 9:20-21)

Noach's father Lemech gave him that name at the time of his birth, "saying: This one shall comfort us (*yenachameinu*) in our work and in the toil of our hands, which comes from the ground which the Lord has cursed" (*Bereishit* 5:29). Upon his emergence from the ark, Noach begins his new life by planting a vineyard and is assigned the designation "man of the earth." How can we understand the shift from Noach’s potential as one who "will comfort us" to "man of the earth"?

**Regarding Wine**

There are many virtues to a vineyard, as implied, for instance, in positive mentions such as: "My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill" (*Yeshayahu* 5:1); and "Shlomo had a vineyard in Keren ben Shemen" (*Shir Ha-Shirim* 8:11). Wine is special in that it “gladdens the heart of man” (*Tehillim* 104:15), and it is also considered a sign of prestige and dominance (which explains the abundance of wine at royal banquets). All of this is true to this very day.

*Chazal* as well praised wine:

Rabbi Chanina said: He who allows himself to be pacified when he is taking wine possesses some of the characteristics of his Creator, for it is stated: "And the Lord smelled the sweet savor; [and said: I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake]." Rabbi Chiyya said: He who retains a clear mind under the influence of wine possesses the characteristics of the seventy elders; for the numerical value of "*yayin"* [wine] is seventy and so is also the numerical value of "*sod*" [secret], so that when wine goes in, counsel departs…

Rabbi Chanina bar Pappa said: A person in whose house wine is not poured like water has not attained the state of blessedness; for it is stated: "And He will bless your bread and your water": just as the "bread" spoken of is a food that may be bought with second-tithe money, so is the "water" a liquid that may be bought with second-tithe money. Such a liquid is, of course, wine, and yet it is called "water." (*Eiruvin* 65a)

On the other hand, the Gemara in *Sanhedrin* (70a) notes that wine is a complex matter, with potential downsides as well: "The Bible writes *tirash* [for wine], but the word is read *tirosh*. If one has merit, he becomes a leader [*rosh*]; if not, he becomes impoverished [*rash*]." It also discusses the great sorrow that wine is liable to bring upon a person.

We see then that wine has a dual nature, and therefore involvement with wine requires caution: it can enhance wisdom, but it can also lead to a total loss of reason.

**“Man of the Earth”**

Noach becomes a "man of the earth" – that is to say, a man who has devoted himself completely to the land, for whom the earth has become a defining part of his identity.

In developing this attachment, he abandons the primary tilling of the soil – i.e., in the field, which is the source of man's food, or as the verse puts it: "By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread" (*Bereishit* 3:19). The plow that he invented had comforted the entire world, relieving the curse of "in toil you shall eat of it" (*Bereishit* 3:17). It was because of that invention that it was stated about him: "This one shall comfort us in our work, and in the toil of our hands" (*Bereishit* 5:29; see Rashi *ad loc*.). Noach abandons all of this, however, and occupies himself with luxuries – with wine. All this because he became addicted to the earth and forgot his destiny, and thus also became addicted to his wine and lost his reason.

Had Noach continued to be the righteous man who planted a vineyard, the vineyard could have strengthened his reason, as Rava says in *Yoma* (76b): "Wine and odorous spices made me wise." But from the moment he transformed into a "man of the earth," he stumbled, giving himself up to the earth and losing his reason – and his nakedness then became exposed, like Adam at the time of his sin.

**Bread vs. Wine**

What then should he have done? Let us turn to the verses in *Tehillim*:

[You] water the mountains from Your upper chambers; the earth is full of the fruit of Your works. [You] cause the grass to spring up for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; to bring forth bread out of the earth. Wine gladdens the heart of man, making the face brighter than oil, and bread stays man's heart. (*Tehillim* 104:13-15)

It is clearly emphasized here that the core of agricultural work must involve man's food – "to bring forth bread out of the earth." This is what these verses mean: Even though wine gladdens man's heart and oil brightens his face, it is bread that stays his heart and sustains him, and therefore it is important to engage in bringing forth bread from the earth.

Of course, there is a place for wine and oil, but *in addition to* the bread. When priorities were distorted, when Noach transitioned from “a righteous and whole-minded man” who “walks with God” (*Bereishit* 6:9) into a "man of the earth," and put wine first, then the wine caused him to lose his judgment.

All this indicates that the same challenges humanity faces today were there from the very beginning. Even after the flood, man's problems were not solved, and we continue to struggle today.

How can we deal with these challenges? The primary task is not in fighting absolute evil; daily life requires a simpler task.

The main challenge lies in determining the correct priorities when dealing with bread that stays, wine that gladdens, and oil that brightens; in shaping one's fundamental identity as a "righteous and whole-minded" person who walks with God and at the same time also works his land, but not as a "man of the earth." The man of the earth will aspire to the prestigious crop, that of the vineyard, whereas the man of God will begin with wheat and bread, and *then* accompany his food with wine – in order to acquire some of the characteristics of his Maker.

1. \* This *sicha* was published in *Daf Kesher* no. 1656, *Parashat Noach* 5781. It was re-edited by Aviad Brestel. The editing was not reviewed by Harav Gigi. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)