Why Four Cups?

DRINKING LIKE KINGS

The Sages of the Mishna said that during the Pesah Seder, “we must see ourselves (act, behave, perform) as if we had just left Egypt.” This means that on the Seder night, we must “act” as people who, in opposition to slaves, live as free and prosperous citizens (bene chorin).

For this performance to be as authentic as possible, firstly, we sit leaning on the left, which was how royalty nobles and aristocrats would sit at that time (see here). Secondly, we drink FOUR cups of wine in one meal. This amount of wine was not standard in a family of moderate means, not even on festive occasions. But it was expected at a banquet of the aristocracy, where wine was served several times: 1. Before dinner –at the reception–, 2. Then, as an appetizer. 3. During dinner, and 4. After dinner as a dessert. The Seder mirrors a festive banquet of noble citizens. We must bear in mind that for us Jews, during 2,000 years of exile, wealth and prosperity was not the rule but the exception. For most people, it was not easy to afford four glasses of wine per guest (this is why the Mishna specifies that public food funds could be used to provide the poor with four glasses of wine per person). And still, we do this so that during the night of the Seder, we “feel the freedom by displaying prosperity,” what Maimonides and the Sages call: The way of the free people “□□□□ □□□.”

THE FOUR BLESSINGS OF THE SEDER

There is another practical reason for the four cups. During the week, it is customary to drink less wine. Generally, wine and meat are reserved for celebrations, especially for Shabbat and Holidays (Yom Tob). In these occasions, wine usually accompanies the recitation of the prayers and blessings we

recite to celebrate these happy moments. On Shabbat, for example, a glass of wine accompanies the recitation of the Qiddush and Birkat haMazon (that is, the blessing after eating a full meal with bread). And we do the same on other festive occasions. For example, we have two glasses of wine at a wedding ceremony: one for the Birkat Irusin and another for the Sheba Berakhot (seven blessings of the bride and groom). Likewise, in a Berit Mila (circumcision), we recite the berakha over a glass of wine.

Wine is associated with joy and celebration.

We celebrate the four steps of the process of redemption from Egypt. When HaShem promised to deliver the Jews from Egyptian slavery, the Tora used four terms to describe our redemption (Exodus 6:6-8): a) "I shall *take* you out…" b) "I shall *rescue* you…" c) "I shall *redeem* you…" d) "I shall *take* you…"

WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT?

There are similarities and differences between the Seder and other regular celebrations.

1. Unlike the Qiddush that we recite on Shabbat or other celebrations where only one person is required to taste the wine, ALL adult participants must drink the four cups at the Pesah Seder.

2. The four cups are assigned to different parts of the Seder, particularly the parts of the Haggada associated with celebration.

1. FIRS CUP: Qiddush.

2. SECOND CUP: Birkat haGeula (blessing of gratitude for our redemption) , at the end of the Haggadah, before dinner (ga-al-Israel). This is a special blessing for Pesach, in which we thank HaShem for having delivered us from Egypt.

3. THIRD CUP: After Birkat HaMazon, the blessing of gratitude after eating a full meal

4. FOURTH CUP: At the time of the Hallel, the recitation of the Psalms of praise to HaShem for having rescued us from Egypt.

Wine Before a Meal

The Gemara in Berakhot (pereq shishi) explains that wine can have an aperitif effect and that a person feels more hungry after he drinks (tuba garir). "… every restaurant knows that if you get a drink first, you're going to eat more," says Robert Considine, one of the authors of a study on obesity at the Indiana University School of Medicine in Indianapolis. Considine and his colleagues found that alcohol motivates a particular area of the brain –the hypothalamus– that makes you focus on food aromas, compared to other odors. The hypothalamus produces hormones that help govern various body functions, including hunger, and directs the brain "to pay more attention to food after consuming a drink".