

SEASONS OF THE MOON

THE MONTH OF NISSAN

Nissan 5759 / March 18, 1999 - April 16, 1999

The huge mirror ball suspended from the ceiling beamed rays of light, penetrating the darkest corner of the discotheque. He thought to himself: "Everyone's dancing. The lights are spinning. The bass is rolling out of the speakers, hitting you in the pit of the stomach like a tank. They've turned the treble up so far that there's enough high frequencies to part your hair at 25 feet. The wine is flowing. And the whole world is dancing. Dancing. Drinking wine and laughing. Why are we so happy? In a few short years, we'll all be dead. This disco is like a giant slaughterhouse. When we're gone, in our place will be a new crop of trendies, dancing and drinking and laughing in this same disco. And they'll dance and drink, and in just another few short years, they'll be dead. And others will dance on their blood. And so on.

By then, of course, they'll have redecorated this place. But the dance will go on. The wine will still flow. This dance of death will go on and on. And they'll all be happily dancing and drinking wine and laughing."

The Secret Of Wine

What is that "high" that comes from wine?

How does wine allow us to be happy even when confronted with our own terrifying mortality? Is it mere alcohol-induced anesthesia that makes us blissfully unaware of our end, or does wine have a power that is more than just an escape from reality? What is the secret of wine?

What The Eye Cannot See

In this world, we cannot grasp something which is without end. Our eyes can only see something finite. That which is without end, in this world, is invisible. The Talmud

tells us that there is something in this world that no eye has seen except for G-d. It is beyond our eyes to see. It is a secret, hidden. The Talmud asks, what is this thing that no eye has seen, this secret which is beyond our grasp? Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi answers, "*This is the wine, guarded in the grape since the six days of Creation.*" Wine is a secret. Its very name connotes hiddenness. The *gematria* (numerical equivalent) of *yayin* (wine) is 70 — the same as *sod* — which means "secret."

TO LIFE



The Revealed And The Concealed

The whole purpose of this world is to reveal. G-d's first utterance was, "Let there be light!" From that moment onward, the entire creation was one revelation after another. All is revealed. Or almost all. There is, however, something in the midst of all this revelation whose purpose is totally the opposite. Its very creation

was a secret — something hidden in the center of this world of revelation. Hidden in existence, hidden at the very center of the world is a secret, like the wine which is hidden in the center of the grape. Let us try and understand what this secret is.

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Getting High

Wine makes you “high.” The expression “high” is apt, because wine takes us and removes us from the world of the outside. It takes us to an interior world which cannot be seen by the physical eye. It lifts us high above the outside world and lets us look within — at the center of things.

The Talmud tells us that “*wine was only created in this world to console mourners and to pay the wicked their reward.*” (*Sanhedrin 70, Erubin, 68*)

How does wine console the bereaved?

If you think about it, happiness is something really amazing. Why do we feel happy? How can we feel happy? Where does this feeling come from? We live for a very short time indeed. Most of our life, we have problems of one kind or another. How can a person really be happy if tomorrow everything will be gone like a vanishing cloud? And not tomorrow. The next minute. The next second.

Extreme Happiness

Happiness can come from one of two extremes: Either we connect to the ultimate Reality, that this world is no more than an antechamber to the real world, or we lose ourselves in a purple haze of illusion. In other words, we can take leave of reality — without transcending it. We can get high — but we don’t make the leap to the realization that there is another world that waits for us after we leave this mortal frame. That world is hidden. Hidden like the wine in the grape. Hidden like the wine which brings solace to the bereaved. For wine brings them the knowledge that those for whom they mourn have not vanished into nothingness, but are in another world.

Either wine allows us to see high above and deep within reality, to perceive this secret at the center of creation; or it can let us create a fantasy world of our own making. We can place ourselves in a state of willful anesthesia where everything is an illusion. Or, by grasping the true nature of existence, our *simcha* can be real. When we understand this secret, we cannot fail to be happy.

FutureWorld

When we realize that the only reason we have been created is to derive the most exquisite of all pleasures of being eternally close to G-d and basking in the radiance of His Presence; when we understand that G-d has created us for no other reason than to do good to us; when we know this, we cannot but be filled with a genuine and immovable happiness. When we realize that all the pain and trouble of this world is merely a prelude to an overwhelming happiness of a future world, all our troubles become nothing in our eyes. For the good that awaits us is boundless and endless, and our present trials are mere storms in a teacup.

Jump For Joy

More than this, anyone who understands the purpose of these trials perceives them not as trials at all. If we understood this properly, we would run out into the street and start to dance. We wouldn’t need to dance in a darkened discotheque. People would look at us as if we had taken leave of our senses. For, in truth, this realization is the essence of all sense and sensibility.

The Ba’al Shem Tov said that if we realized what it means to be the descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, if we really understood what it means to be a Jew, we would tip our hat to one side and kick up our feet in a Cossack dance.

If we each realized that the whole world has been made because of me and that everything — every star in the sky, every bird, every tree — has been put in place for me, we would be delirious with joy.

But this information is not revealed in the creation. It’s hidden inside. Like the wine which is hidden in the grape.

Happy Birthday, Israel!

Pesach is the “time of our freedom.” On the physical level, we are celebrating the Exodus from Egypt. However, on a deeper level, we are celebrating what it means to be a Jew. The Seder is the birthday party of the Jewish People. When we raise those four glasses of wine on Pesach, we are celebrating not just the birth of the nation but the ultimate freedom — the freedom from death. G-d has planted immortality, a life without end, within us. This is the ultimate freedom. L’Chaim! To Life!