

Pesach, 5775, 2015:

Rabbi David Etengoff

Why Do We Have Only Four Cups of Wine at the Seder?

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yechiel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Chaim Mordechai Hakohen ben Natan Yitzchak, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Avraham Yechezkel ben Yaakov Halevy, HaRav Yosef Shmuel ben HaRav Reuven Aharon, the *refuah shlainah* of Devorah bat Chana, and Yitzhak Akiva ben Malka, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

The drinking of the Four Cups of Wine (*arba'ah kosot*) is one of the best-known and most universally accepted mitzvot of the Seder. Rav Huna, in the name of Rav Benaya (*Midrash Bereishit Rabbah* 88:11-13), derives this obligation from the following four expressions of redemption (*arba'ah leshonei geula*) that the Almighty uttered to Moshe:

Therefore, say to the children of Israel, “I am the L-rd, and I will take you (*v'hotzati*) out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you (*v'hitzalti*) from their labor, and I will redeem you (*v'ga'alti*) with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. And I will take you (*v'lakachti*) to Me as a people, and I will be a G-d to you, and you will know that I am the L-rd your G-d, Who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.” (*Sefer Shemot* 6:6-7, this and all Bible translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*)

The Torah's narrative continues with the following verse: “I will bring you (*veheveti*) to the land, concerning which I raised My hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, and I will give it to you as a heritage; I am the L-rd.” We are now met with an exegetical challenge: If the phrases *v'hotzati*, *v'hitzalti*, *v'ga'alti* and *v'lakachti* are understood as expressions of *geula*, why was not *veheveti* interpreted in this manner and why, by extension, did it not generate its own cup of wine?

My rebbi and mentor, Rabbi Soloveitchik *zatzal* (1903-1993), known as “the Rav” by his

students and disciples, addressed our concerns by suggesting:

... *Chazal* [Our Sages of blessed Memory] felt that this [including “*veheveti*” as a fifth expression of *Geula*] would not be appropriate on the Seder night. Why is this the case? Firstly, the four references of *Geula* that were stated by the Almighty to Moshe in *Sidrat Vaera* were new ideas that had not been expressed to the Patriarchs. However, “*veheveti*,” “and I shall bring you into the land...” was already promised to Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov in their respective *Brit Avot* [Covenant of the Patriarchs]. They were already promised that their descendants would inherit the Land of Israel. (This, and the following quotations are from, “The Nine Aspects of the Haggada,” page 7, *Pesach To Go* 5766, 2006, YUTorah.org, reprinted with permission from the Yeshiva University Haggada, 1984, and based upon a 1977 *shiur* that I attended, brackets my own)

In sum, the Rav stressed that the *arba'ah leshonei geula* were unique in that they were never before stated promises to an enslaved generation that was desperately seeking physical and spiritual revitalization. Thus, these expressions of redemption were the absolutely necessary words to galvanize our subjugated nation.

Rav Soloveitchik suggested a second theologically based reason as to why *Chazal* excluded “*veheveti*” from the expressions of redemption:

Secondly, although the Jewish people did enter into the Land of Israel subsequent to the Exodus from Egypt, this was not the primary goal of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* [the Departure from Egypt]. It was their destination but not their destiny. The direct goal of *Yetziat Mitzrayim* was the revelation at Sinai. The goal was the transformation of a subjugated people into “a nation of priests and a holy nation.” It was not just to grant them political and economic freedom, but also to create a sacred people. (Brackets and underlining my own)

Herein, the Rav teaches us that our ultimate purpose within Hashem’s Divine plan is to become “a nation of priests and a holy nation” that is completely dedicated to His service. Therefore, while the Land of Israel was, and is, our holy physical place, the Revelation at Mount Sinai represents our eternal destiny. As such, “*veheveti*” was not added to the *arba'ah leshonei geula* – for only the four expression foreshadowed our singular role as

Hashem's chosen people. As a result, we drink four cups of wine at the Seder to symbolize the *arba'ah leshonei geula*.

With Hashem's beneficent mercy and loving-kindness, may this *Pesach* be our final one in *Galut* (the Diaspora), and may we merit the complete fulfillment of both the *arba'ah leshonei geula* and *veheveti* soon and in our days. *V'chane yihi ratzon*.

Shabbat Shalom and *Chag Kasher v'Sameach*

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The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email rdbe718@gmail.com.

*** My audio *shiurim* for Women on "*Tefilah: Haskafah* and Analysis," may be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpyd>

*** I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. They are available here: <http://tinyurl.com/82pgvfn>.

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