

Parsha Ponders

Pesach #2 | March 25, 2021 | 11 Nissan 5781

Four connected expressions of freedom¹

בין הכוסות הללו, אם רוצה לשתות, ישתה. בין שלישי לרביעי, לא ישתה

Between [the first and second, or second and third]² cups, if one wants to drink, they may. Between the third and fourth cup, don't drink [anything]³

Our Sages enacted that we drink four cups of wine at the *Seder*, at different points of significance. One we drink for *Kiddush*, like any other Yom Tov. One we drink after finishing “*Maggid*”, the main part of the *Haggadah*, where we tell over the Exodus story. One we drink after saying *Birkas HaMazon*, the Grace after meals. The final cup we drink after finishing *Hallel*, Psalms of praise to Hashem for redeeming us. Our Sages specified certain rules for how to drink the cups, and in what manner. They specified an interesting rule. One is allowed to drink as much as they want between any of the first three cups. However, between the third and fourth cup, consuming any beverage is forbidden. Why would this be?

One simple reason⁴ is that by that point in the *Seder*, it's already been a long night. The person has consumed three cups of wine. If they would be allowed to drink as they please, they may further consume alcoholic beverages. They may become intoxicated, and be unable to finish the *Seder* the way they're supposed to. To prevent such a situation, the Sages said not to drink *anything* until the fourth cup. Another explanation is⁵ that before the meal and throughout, drinking wine can add to a person's appetite. Therefore, any additional drink may simply be looked at as part of the meal. However, after the meal is over and the person drinks the third cup, there's no need anymore to increase one's appetite. Why then are they drinking wine? Any additional cup of wine could then appear like it's one of the special cups of the *Seder*. Since there are supposed to be four cups and no more, the Sages saw fit to forbid any drinking, to avoid this concern from occurring.

While these explanations are more in line with the simple intent of the Sages, perhaps a more subtle explanation can be suggested. If we were to take a poll of worldwide Jewry and were to ask them their feelings about the four cups, there would probably be a unanimous response. The first cup is exciting, as it sets the tone for the evening. The second cup is inspiring, as it concludes the incredible story of the Exodus. The third cup is decent, as it marks a fitting end to the meal. If we were to ask people, they would probably say they could do without the fourth cup. After all that wine and *matzah*, most people probably had enough.

One of the explanations⁶ for why the Sages instituted four cups of wine at the *Seder* is to correlate to the four expressions of redemption that appear in the Torah: והוצאתי אתכם, I took you out⁷, והצלתי

¹ Based on a *shiur* from Rav Asher Weiss in 5773, available online at <https://www.torahbase.org/four-kosos-5773/>

² See Rashbam to Pesachim 108a s.v. בין כוסות הללו. For some reason Rashi *ad. loc.* only mentions between the first and second cup, and Rashbam to ibid 117b s.v. says between the first two cups and the last two cups (essentially meaning, between the second and third cup)

³ Pesachim 10:7

⁴ Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:6, brought by Rashbam *loc. cit.*

⁵ Rashbam to Pesachim 108a *loc. cit.* It's interesting that he only brings this explanation there, and not on the *Mishnah* that says this law

⁶ Bereishis Rabbah 88:5 and Yerushalmi Pesachim 10:1, cited by Rashi and Rashbam to Pesachim 99b s.v. ארבע כוסות

⁷ Exodus 6:6

אתכם, I saved you⁸, וגאלתי אתכם, I redeemed you⁹, ולקחתי אתכם, I took you [for Me to be a nation]¹⁰. If we were to ask people, the first three would definitely be relatable concepts. Independence, security, freedom. These values resonate with people. They're naturally easy to accept. The last expression of freedom is a harder pill to swallow. Obedience, subservience, and loyalty to Hashem are things people are naturally inclined to avoid. We like our independence, and have a hard time with authority.

The Sages forbidding drinking between the third and fourth cup was to teach us not to make a separation. Sure, freedom and independence are wonderful, but they're meaningless without Hashem in our lives. The fourth cup, which represents us being Hashem's nation, not just any nation, goes hand in hand with the other cups. The other cups have no danger if they're disconnected, so they allowed us to drink as we please. To connect the fourth cup to the others, they forbade drinking anything else¹¹.

Good Shabbos and Chag Sameach!

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ *Ibid*

¹⁰ *Ibid* v. 7

¹¹ It's interesting then that the fourth expression of redemption is separated from the others in its own verse