

Am I Too Old To Drink?

The challenges that we face in our lives can be the greatest tool to evoke our inner greatness and strength. There is a famous saying “ We don’t grow when things are easy, we grow when we face challenges.” A once simple foundation has become a lost art in our society. The new accepted norm is escapism. The courageous approach of confronting our problems and rising to the occasion, has been replaced by cowardly quick fix solutions, which allow us to ignore our reality. In this week's Parsha we get a vivid picture of the danger of this approach.

Noach sets out of the ark to rebuild the world, and he begins by planting a vineyard. From this vineyard he produces wine and becomes drunk. This resulted in him becoming unclothed in his private tent. His son Cham sees him in this degraded state and informs his brothers. The Ralbag derives from here an extremely powerful lesson. He says, “It is appropriate for a person to distance himself from drinking more than the normal amount of wine. This is because, if he drinks beyond the normal amount, it will result in him being embarrassed and suffering a loss.” This lesson is derived from the fact that although Noach was such a righteous and complete person, he was impacted negatively. This lesson applies to anything intoxicating.”

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The Ralbag does not say that one should refrain from drinking more than the normal amount because it may cause embarrassment and loss. Rather he imparts that definitively, “it will result in embarrassment and loss.” If someone on the caliber of Noach, who had tremendous self-control, and had no need to escape reality, could be impacted so negatively, that means this result is inevitable.

The penetrating insight into human nature that the Ralbag imparts can help us to refrain from placing ourselves in situations in which we can lose control. As human beings we tend to fool ourselves and rationalize that the result will not happen to me, it is only a possibility. With the knowledge that suffering embarrassment and loss is not just a mere possibility but a definite reality, we will be better equipped to resist this great temptation.

The Midrash Rabbah on Parshas Noach offers us an insight into the power of this temptation. The Midrash says that at the time Noach went to plant a vineyard he met the minister of the demons. The demon said to Noach “We are partners, be careful not to enter into my portion, because if you do I will destroy you.” The commentators explain that the demon was telling Noach, since wine brings a person to sin, by drinking wine you become the perfect prey, and it’s as if your partnering with me to cause you to sin. At first analysis the demon's statement to Noach that “we are partners, upon meeting him planting a vineyard”, seems premature. Planting is merely the preparatory state for drinking the wine, and should not be associated with losing control and sinning at this point. Why is the demon calling Noach his partner now? The compelling answer is that the Demon understood that planting the vineyard sets into motion an irresistible attraction to partake in this drink. The demon is assured that this will happen once the access is there. Therefore the demon rejoices with his new found partner, from the moment he plants a vineyard.

We see from here that the allure of intoxicating beverages is extremely powerful. Resisting them requires great strength and awareness. Hopefully by focusing on the guaranteed negative consequences, we will be able to maintain control and stay in touch with reality.

BASED ON THE WEEKLY SHMUSS GIVEN BY HARAV SHAYA COHEN, ROSH HAYESHIVA ZICHRON ARYEH

לעילוי נשמת גיטל בת הרב אליעזר מנוח
לעילוי נשמת הרב יוסף חיים בן מאיר
לרפואה שלמה רפאל חיים דוב בן ריסא שושנה