

Faith Matters: Removing drops of wine during the Passover Seder

Sacred text a reminder that we should not exult in the fall and pain of our opponents, writes Moshe Meirovich

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During the Passover Seder one is obligated to drink a small amount from four cups of wine.

Wine as recorded in Psalm 104:15, “gladdens the heart of mankind,” but more specifically the number 4 symbolically refers to the four Hebrew words of redemption mentioned in Exodus 6:6-8: Say to the Israelites, “I will bring you forth ... from bondage ... I will save you ... I will redeem you ... I will bring you into the land.”

Accordingly, the Haggadah, the sacred text capturing the Exodus narrative recited at the Seder, reminds us that from that first cup of wine when we arrive at the recitation of the Ten Plagues inflicted upon the Egyptians we are to diminish the level of our joy.

In the words of Don Isaac Abarbanel (1437-1508), our redemption [from bondage] had to come by means of the punishment of other human beings. [Egyptians].

This concept of compassion is anchored in the Book of Proverbs: “If your enemy falls, do not exult.” (24:17)

Indeed, this idea gained prominence in rabbinic literature where Rabbi Yirmiyahu Low (1812-1874) asserted: Since the Jewish people are filled with mercy, and through our being saved from Egypt, God’s creatures were lost and drowned. Although it is a great joy for us that God took us out of Egypt and redeemed us, it is still painful for us that through this, others were destroyed ... If God had saved us without causing loss and death to others, it would have been a greater happiness.”