



Parshat Chukat

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STARTING POINT

Aharon Was Chosen Twice - by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

STARTING POINT

The "Chukah" of the Torah - by Rabbi Amnon Bazak

This week's portion begins with the phrase, "This is the law of the Torah" [Bamidbar 19:2]. This includes two terms that are basically opposite, "chukah" and Torah. Chukah usually refers to an act that Bnei Yisrael have been commanded to perform or to refrain from doing, typically a permanent command. One example is the positive commandment related to Pesach: "Celebrate it as a holiday for G-d throughout your generations, an eternal law" [Shemot 12:14]. With respect to Yom Kippur, "Let this be for you an eternal law, in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict your souls" [Vayikra 16:29]. The phrase also appears with respect to the prohibition of eating forbidden fats and blood, "As an eternal law for your generations, in all your settlements, do not eat any fat or any blood" [3:17]. The term "Torah," on the other hand, refers to a group of mitzvot which includes general principles and specific details (one exception is in the book of Devarim, where "Torah" is the title given to the summary of all the mitzvot). For example, at the end of the description of the sacrifices, it is written, "This is the Torah of the Olah, the Mincha, the Chatat, the Asham, the additional sacrifices, and the Shelamim sacrifice" [7:37], referring to the complete system of sacrifices, including the differences between them. The laws of leprosy end in a similar way: "This is the Torah for all blemishes of tzaraat or a netek. Also for tzaraat of a garment or of a house..." [14:54-55]. This leads us to wonder what the meaning is of the combined phrase, "the Chukah of the Torah." Does this refer to specific mitzvot or to a complete system with assorted details?

It may be that this is the main point of the issue of the Red Heifer (Bamidbar 19-1:22). The passage can be divided into two parts. Verses 1-10 describe the "chukah" – preparing the ashes of the heifer, meant to serve as an eternal law (see 19:10). The second section of the passage refers to "Torah," as is written explicitly, "This is the Torah: if a man dies in a tent..." [19:14]. Indeed, many details of the laws are listed. But at this point, there is an innovation. As opposed to other cases of a "Torah," which usually present various details, with their specific laws, this "Torah" leads to the same practice in all cases. (1) "This is the Torah: if a man dies in a tent, anything that enters the tent and anything that is in the tent will be ritually impure for seven days. (2) And any open utensil that does not have a seal on it will be impure. (3) And anything that touches, in an open field, one killed by a sword, or a dead body, or a human bone or a grave, will be impure for seven days." [19:14-17]. In addition,

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the verse that describes the way to become ritually pure includes all the different cases at once, without distinguishing between them. "Let a pure man take hyssop and dip it into the water, and let him sprinkle it on the tent and on all the utensils, and on the people who were there, and on one who touched a bone or a dead body or a grave." [19:18].

Thus, it seems that the main message of this passage lies in this particular phrase, "the chukah of the Torah." As opposed to other cases, where there are different details depending on circumstances, with respect to ritual impurity connected to death the "Torah" is a "chukah" – all the different types of impurity are treated in the same way. This emphasizes the severity of this type of impurity, and it prepares mankind to make the proper choice: "I have presented you with life and death, a blessing and a curse. You shall choose life, in order that you and your descendents will continue to live" [Devarim 30:19].

POINT OF VIEW

The Shell of "Noga" - by Prof. Shalom Rozenberg

The Torah portion of Chukat, especially when the beginning is read as the special portion of "Parshat Parah," has always served as a starting point for a discussion of wisdom and its limits. This has been noted particularly in the Midrash, which points out paradoxes in the world and in the halacha. "With respect to everybody who is involved with the Red Heifer, from beginning to end, their clothes become impure, but the process itself purifies clothing. The Almighty said, I have made a rule, I have created a decree, you are not permitted to violate my decree." In this article, I would like to look at this issue from another angle, based on the approach of Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech from Dinov, in his book, "Igra D'Kalah" (267:2). He writes, "In the writings of the Holy ARI, the secret of the Heifer is explained as the secret of the shell of 'Noga,' Venus, which causes the impure to be purified and causes the pure to become impure."

The concept of the "kliptot," mystical shells, can be traced to the vision of the Holy Chariot. In this vision, four awesome effects are revealed. "And I looked, and behold (1) a stormy

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wind came from the north, (2) a great cloud, (3) and a burning flame, (4) with a glow – Noga - around it..." [Yechezkel 1:4]. Similar effects are seen by Eliyahu at Chorev. "There was a great and strong wind, one that could destroy mountains and shatter rocks ... And after the wind came an earthquake... and after the earthquake a flame..." [I Melachim 19:11-12]. And we are told, "G-d is not in the wind... G-d is not in the earthquake... G-d is not in the fire" [ibid]. Only after all of these does the prophet hear "a thin sound of silence" [19:12]. So we see that a Divine vision is clouded by "shells." Just what are these shells? At a very superficial level, we can say that the three outermost shells represent the sins that trap mankind at all levels of life. As Rabbi Tzvi says, "It is well known that the three impure shells are completely impure, and that they are not connected at all to holiness." They can never be redeemed. "This is not true about the fourth shell, the shell of the glow." This shell is on the borderline, "between holiness and the shells, and it holds the secret of good and evil. Sometimes it is included in holiness while sometimes the opposite is true."

The shell of "Noga" corresponds to human sensuality, the relationship to the body and its pleasures. And indeed this sensuality can be used for good or for evil. Rabbi Tzvi notes that the shell of Noga is described by the word "Tikla," symbolizing a scale or a balance. Noga is "like the pointer on a scale, which sometimes points in one direction and sometimes in the other." Judaism in fact rejects the concept of asceticism and does not feel that physical torture is a sacrifice that man must make for heaven, as is felt in many other religions, both in the east and in the west. On the other hand, Judaism cannot calmly accept the modern version of the return to idolatry. The equilibrium point of sensuality has been lost for our generation.

The first three shells represent evil actions: murder, rape, robbery, corruption. They correspond to corrupt emotions and twisted faith. "Everything that has been forbidden by the Torah, items which receive their spark of life from these three completely impure shells... must be destroyed completely, as will happen in the end of days, when the spirit of impurity will be removed from the earth." On the other hand, the actions "and material things which are permitted... stem from the shell of Noga, part of the secret of the balance, and the main efforts of man should be related to this issue." This area of endeavor must be redeemed and not destroyed. The Chassidic approach demands that a person move the balance to the side of good by intent, that is, that his actions should be in G-d's name. This is a very difficult demand. It requires the participation of the soul and not the body. We should never eliminate any elements of our lives, we must learn to build them as rungs of an ethical ladder. "Knowledge... will disperse in all its measures... It will proceed from that power to the service of G-d, blessed be He." The same is true about sexuality "and also about business, and everything else that is done which has not been prohibited by the laws of the Torah."

Rabbi Tzvi emphasizes the trivial: "Man was created in such a way that it is impossible for him to exist without being active" in matters pertaining to his body. Judaism does not reject this activity, rather in some circumstances it has transformed the activity into a mitzva, a commandment. The highest levels of holiness are not achieved by asceticism but by sanctifying day

to day activities. This is the way to redeem Noga. I do not think that we, as trivial individuals, can bring about the redemption of this shell. We are far removed from holiness, but we must be involved in purity and repentance. This is a difficult demand within our culture, which has lost our sense of sensuality and searches for relief from this loss in temptations of the shells, sexual lust, alcohol, and drugs.

What is the deeper meaning of the statement that the shell of Noga is in essence paradoxical? The fact that "it makes the pure impure" is something that we can accept without any explanation, but what does it mean to "purify the impure?" According to Rabbi Tzvi, the answer lies in a verse in Iyov: "He absorbed wealth but he will spit it out" [20:15]. The change in our attitude towards Noga will occur when what has been absorbed into the impurity will be set free. Rabbi Tzvi would undoubtedly not have been happy with my explanation, but I will take the opportunity to say it. There are many phenomena that in themselves are not forbidden but have been taken over by impurity. Examples are the press and the theater, and art as a whole. Perhaps we will soon see the shells expel these negative social effects. As Rabbi Tzvi writes, "When Noga is transformed into holiness, it can purify the impure. When the opposite is true, G-d forbid, and a person causes the impure shells to take charge, then Noga makes the pure become impure. And this is the main labor which man should perform on the earth – to make sure that Noga rises up and becomes holy."

SERMON BY A GUEST

A Rod of Punishment Versus a Pleasant Rod - by Rabbi Yeshaya Steinberger, Rabbi of Ramot Sharet and Denia, Jerusalem, and Teacher in Yeshivat Hakotel

It was Moshe's initiative to make the copper serpent. He was guided by the principle of a play on words – a serpent is "nachash" in Hebrew, copper is "nechoshet." It also seems to correspond to a line of thought that runs throughout this week's Torah portion, a mutual relationship between nature and the will of G-d.

The portion begins with a "chukah," a decree whose reason is not known. This is a clash between human logic and the will of G-d. Shlomo, who represents human wisdom, says about the Red Heifer, "I am wise, but this is far away from me" [Kohellet 7:23]. Moshe, the servant of G-d, who represents G-d's desire, is the only one who understands the secret.

Moshe's sin about the Water of Controversy can be looked at in a similar way. This was a missed opportunity to create harmony between nature and the word of G-d. Thus, even a clear miracle, providing water as a result of striking a stone, does not lead to sanctifying G-d's name. There is a wide chasm between speaking to the rock and striking it. The first possibility is an expression of harmony, while the second explicitly shows the struggle between nature and the Divine will. Even though the will of G-d triumphs in the end, disharmony has already been created. The statement, "You did not have faith in me to sanctify me" [Bamidbar 20:12], is a reprimand for using a stick instead of the preferred peaceful technique.

This same concept applies to the request for peace with the surrounding nations. The army of G-d seeks peace and works in a pleasant way. The antithesis in this case is Adom's reply, "I will come out towards you with the sword" [20:18], representing brutality and preparations for war. As happened earlier with Amalek, the fear of Bnei Yisrael – represented in the Midrash as a scalding "bath" – is decreased. Even though Bnei Yisrael triumph the "bath," the damage has been done.

This also explains the miracle of the Arnon River canyon. One bank had caves, while the other side had matching protrusions. The Canaanites, who set an ambush for Bnei Yisrael when they passed through the canyon, were punished by having the mountain shake, so that the protrusions went into the caves in the mountains and crushed them to death. One side moved towards the other "as a maid goes towards her mistress." In this case, nature, fully coordinated with the word of G-d, rose to the challenge.

When Bnei Yisrael were forced to fight Sichon, G-d said, "Why do you trouble me about making war with every nation? Let all the people go to fight them, and they will be defeated in one blow." This was like simple surgery, quick and easy.

Thus, in the case of the serpent, the play on words is an important element. It implies that it was necessary to have complete coordination even in terms of the language. This included the name serpent – nachash, hinting at understanding the will of G-d – and the raw material - nechoshet, a natural item. The glorious word of G-d can best be seen in a thin sound of silence, not in a roar, such as is made by violent struggles.

TORAH, SOCIETY, AND GOVERNMENT

Water of Controversy - by Rabbi Uri Dasberg

Every generation has its own controversy over water. In our generation, this is the "Movil," the national pipeline providing water to the southern parts of the country. The water flows every day of the year, from the Kinneret to the plains of the Negev. The water from this pipeline is consumed almost everywhere in the land, with only a few places still using local wells and springs. When the holiday of Pesach approached, some people began to fear that perhaps the water in their homes had come from the Kinneret, where the water had been mixed with chametz that had been thrown into the lake as bait for fish or had been left behind by people on a picnic. Is this water suitable for use on Pesach? It is true that it can take as long as 30 days after water is pumped from the Kinneret until it reaches a home, that there are tremendous amounts of water involved (about 6.5 million cubic meters of water a day), and that the authorities filter the water many times before releasing it for use. But even the smallest trace of chametz is forbidden on Pesach!

One might claim that any chametz was mixed into the water before Pesach, and that it was then diluted into very large amounts of water. However, it is possible that we still cannot ignore a single piece of chametz that "was awakened" – a halachic concept that means the chametz is to be taken into

account. It might also be that some water reaches the home much more quickly than the maximum estimate given above, within a few days of leaving the Kinneret – perhaps water used on the last days of Pesach was mixed with chametz after the holiday began. Since such chametz, if it exists, has been in the water for more than 24 hours, it can be considered as having been marinated or cooked – have we cooked chametz on Pesach, G-d forbid?

There are several reasons why these questions are not relevant. First, the possibility that the chametz "was awakened" depends on a series of doubtful possibilities: Perhaps no chametz was ever mixed in with the water; perhaps if there is chametz it was mixed into the water before Pesach; perhaps any chametz was consumed by the fish in the Kinneret or other biological material that the authorities have placed in the lake in order to maintain the biological balance; perhaps any chametz has become completely liquid, and has dissolved into the water. As to the possibility of "cooking," this only refers to a case where the material has been kept statically in the same water for 24 hours, with no water added. In addition, even the "smallest possible amount" that is forbidden on Pesach has its limits. While it is less than the usual limit of 1/60, it must be larger than one part in 6.5 million.

Finally, we should note that we have not invented the wheel with respect to this question. In the past, for example, Jews lived on the banks of the Danube River, where many flour mills were operated by Gentiles every day of the year, including Pesach. One of the rabbis who discussed the question of using water from the Danube under these conditions wrote, "The sages did not make a decree in a case where there is no chance that the taste of the material will ever be felt." Another wrote, "A running river does not take on the taste of any added material."

Reference: Rabbi Yehuda Preiss, "Techumin," volume 25, pages 481-492

A LESSON FOR THE CHILDREN

Thief! - by Rabbi Yikhat Rozen, Merkaz Neria, Kiryat Malachi

Before the outing, the teacher announced that every student was required to bring some money to cover the expenses of the trip. The students brought the money the next day, and the teacher collected it and put it in her bag.

But then, a disaster happened! When the teacher returned from recess and opened her bag (which she had left in the classroom), she was shocked to find that a bill of one hundred Shekels had disappeared. Could this be? Was there a thief in the class? The teacher went wild with anger. She was upset, she investigated and tried to find out how the money had disappeared and who had taken it. When she came to the conclusion that she could not find the answers to her questions, she decided not to give up but to treat the matter as seriously as possible. So she turned to the police and asked them to continue the investigation.

When a policeman came into the classroom, the pupils were shocked. Some of them fidgeted in their seats in discomfort, waiting to see what would happen next. But the policeman did not start his investigation immediately. He stood in front of the class and said, "Look, somebody here is a thief. I have experience, and I know what I am talking about. If I try to find out who the thief is, I may discover him after a very large effort, but there is a good chance that I will never be able to find him. Unfortunately, I know this path very well. The thief will see that he has succeeded in a small case, and he will then try something bigger. He will probably succeed in that too, because the police very often do not catch a thief, and he will then go on to bigger and bigger things. He will continue to succeed – but he will be a thief! He will have money and many things, but he will always know that he obtained everything by stealing.

"And that is why I am not sure about the possibility of catching this thief. Rather, I would like to suggest a different approach.

"Instead of getting all of us tired out by a long investigation, I have the following suggestion. Every one of the pupils will be given a blank envelope with no identifying marks and will return it to the teacher tomorrow. The one who stole the money will simply put it back into the envelope. In this way, we will never know who the thief was, but the boy himself will know that he is no longer a thief! He will know that he has returned to the straight and narrow path."

The next day every boy brought his envelope back and put it on the teacher's desk. The teacher opened every envelope with a trembling heart, and indeed, a bill of one hundred Shekels was in one of them! The words of the policeman had made an impression on the young minds, and the thief had decided to repent from his bad ways before it was too late.

This story was told by Nechama Leibowitz, who was a wise student and an outstanding teacher. She told other similar stories, where a sinner was given an opportunity to repent without anybody else knowing he had sinned. In each case, the sinner passed the test.

I can add a similar story that happened to me. One time, some money that had been hidden in a drawer disappeared from my house, and it seemed most likely that it had been taken by a child who participated in a regular study group in my house. At a meeting of the group, we told this story, and we emphasized that the thief had a real opportunity to mend his ways and to know that he would be cleared in his own mind and before the Almighty at the same time. We did not talk about the specific theft in our home but in general, saying that one who is a thief can return what he stole without anybody knowing about it.

A few weeks later, we opened the drawer – and the missing money had been returned.

The trust and the mature attitude had the proper effect.

(If you also have an interesting story to tell, you are invited to send it to us.)

THE WAYS OF THE FATHERS (Pirkei Avot)

Chapter 4 - by Rabbi Yehuda Shaviv

It is not easy to understand the structure of this chapter of Avot. It is not in chronological sequence, like Chapter 1, nor in a logical sequence, such as Chapter 2 (choosing the right path for a man) or Chapter 3 (maintaining a close link to Torah). There is also no numerical sequence as there is in Chapter 5 (lists of ten, seven, etc).

Perhaps the fact that the editor spread the words of Rabbi Meir over two or three Mishnayot that are not close together shows that he had some logical criterion for the sequence. (Note that the number of times Rabbi Meir appears depends on the identity of Rabbi Nehorai, who is quoted in Mishna 14 – according to some, this is another name for Rabbi Meir, see Eirubin 13b). By looking at the words of Rabbi Meir, we can see that they have been placed in a context similar to the nearby Mishnayot.

In Mishna 10, there are four statements by Rabbi Meir on the subject of studying Torah (including the advice, "Be humble in front of every person" – see the interpretation of Rabeinu Yonah). Evidently, this Mishna has been placed here because of the third sentence, "If you have avoided Torah study, you will be opposed by many cases of avoidance." This follows the words of Rabbi Yonatan in the previous Mishna, "Anybody who avoids the Torah because of great wealth will in the end avoid it because of poverty."

Another statement by Rabbi Meir is quoted in Mishna 20. "Do not look at a jug but at what is inside it. There may be a new vessel filled with aged wine, or an old vessel that does not even have new wine" (note that there is a manuscript which attributes this to Rebbi and not to Rabbi Meir). This seems to strongly contradict the words of the two scholars who appear before this Mishna, Elisha Ben Abuya and Rabbi Yossi Bar Yehuda. They both discussed old and young people. Elisha compared the study of an old man to that of a younger one, while Rabbi Yossi compared being taught by an old man to being taught by a young one. They both lead to the same conclusion: an older teacher is better, because one who studies from an old man "can be compared to one who eats ripe grapes and drinks aged wine." Rabbi Meir continues with the parable of wine, but he does not agree with the moral. He notes that it is not the quality of the vessel that counts (that is, the age of the teacher) but rather what it contains. Thus, it is possible that "a new jug (a young teacher) is filled with aged (wine)."

This statement is very well suited to Rabbi Meir in that he looks at the internal worth while ignoring the external covering. Based on this type of approach, Rabbi Meir did not refrain from continuing to study Torah from Elisha Ben Abuya, even after he started to follow a bad path. Even though the vessel had become spoiled, Rabbi Meir felt that the wine inside had still retained its value. This corresponds to the well known parable, "Rabbi Meir found a pomegranate, ate its inside and threw out the rind" [Chagiga 15b].

LAND OF MY BIRTH

The Struma - by Zev Wallack

The Struma was an old and very small ship, build as a ferry to move cattle on the Danube River. It was never dreamed that the boat would be used to take people across a stormy sea. When it was no longer in use, an old motor that had been retrieved from a sunken ship was installed in it. In the wild days at the end of the year 1941, two experienced and greedy ship traders took advantage of the distress of the Jews who were anxious to travel to Eretz Yisrael. They advertised that the ship Struma was about to leave for the land, and they greatly exaggerated the ship's properties. In order to make it seem that this ocean voyage was trustworthy and respected, they signed contracts with the following promises:

"The owners of the ship guarantee: (1) to take the passengers from the port of Constance in Romania to the port of Haifa in Palestine; (2) to provide sufficient food for the entire trip; (3) to provide a pallet for every passenger to sleep. The ship abides by all the required standards. As proof: (1) A certificate signed by the Romanian sea-going authority; (2) a picture of a new diesel engine that has been installed (as it were); (3) a picture of a cabin with six beds."

When the passengers boarded the "ship," they discovered the great fraud. While the refugees who boarded the Struma did not really expect a luxury voyage, they had been promised reasonable conditions for the trip. They found themselves on a small and rickety ship, with the cold of winter typical of Europe in December, and a hold that was suffocating and filled with stench and the smell of evaporating coal. The crowding was difficult to bear. About 770 tickets were sold for this wretched voyage. It was almost impossible to find a captain who would agree to take this wreck of a ship out to a stormy sea full of dangerous mines.

The loading of the passengers took four days, and just as the ship was about to leave all the passengers were ordered to disembark. This command was given by German officers who checked the documents, took pictures of the fugitives in various poses, and mocked the Jews for sailing in a "rat ship." After three hours of abuse, the passengers were allowed to return to the ship.

When the Struma finally left the dock, all of the troubles were forgotten and the passengers were filled with a new hope. But this did not last for long. The engine worked for only 15 minutes, and then it stopped. Only after a whole day did the Romanians agree to fix the engine for an astronomical sum. In order to obtain the money, the suffering passengers were forced to give up all the jewelry that they had, including wedding rings. The food situation was terrible. The fruits and vegetables were completely rotten, slices of toast were soaked by water that had seeped into the hold, the coal in the kitchen was also wet so that it was impossible to cook or heat water, and fresh water was very scarce.

A ray of hope rose when the passengers saw the port of Istanbul in the distance. As one of the passengers wrote:

"It was strange to see the city of Kushta... at the hour when the lights were put on... after the nights we had spent without any light in the hold of our ship... Millions of lights gave us a feeling of hope and faith... that no further evil would occur to us... After all, the engine had stopped, we were short on fuel and food, the sailors wanted to abandon the ship... but now we had some hope."

However, the joy died down very quickly. The Struma was put under a blockade and no help was offered to it. The passengers signaled that they needed food and medicine, newspapers, and help to fix the radio, so that they would not be separated from the rest of the world. The ship was held outside the port of Istanbul for 70 days, and they did not receive any help. The passengers were in a desperate situation, and they managed to continue, with great difficulty, only because of the internal discipline and the organization of the ship's committee. Here is what one of the passengers wrote, in Romanian:

"My dears, I have been on the Struma for two months, with a large number of other immigrants, on the coast of Istanbul, without any contact with the outside world, under horrible conditions and with very little chance of survival. Please, do everything you can to save us!!"

In the meantime, the story of the terrible situation of the passengers was publicized. Institutions and private individuals tried to help in various ways. But just when it appeared that a solution had finally been found, the Turks towed the ship to the deep sea and abandoned it there to the storms and the mines. On February 24, 1942, at 09:00 in the morning, the sound of a loud explosion was heard on the ship. Within a few minutes, the Struma sank to the bottom, carrying with it 765 potential immigrants to Eretz Yisrael. The only one who was saved was David Stuliar, who was able to tell the world about the horrors of the voyage.

(Source: L. Kuperstein, "The Story of the Struma")

THE FIELD OF EDUCATION

Learning Zionism by Experience - by the Department of Education, World Mizrahi

As Rabbi Kook said, "the settlement of Eretz Yisrael and the growing of produce from the desolate land is an overt sign that the end of the exile is near and redemption is close." The slogans of the Jewish nation for all its past generations have been, "I will raise Jerusalem to the top of my happiness" [Tehillim 137:6]... "If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten" [137:5]. In moments of sadness, hardship, and terrorism, the nation gathers within itself, gains strength, and rises up. In such desperate moments, the way to oppose the oppressors is for Yisrael to unite. The people in Zion study the Torah of Eretz Yisrael and know that the eternal bond between the nation, the Torah, and the land will never be broken.

In the wake of the difficult security situation in recent years, the teaching staff at the "Dugma" religious grammar school in Jerusalem decided that their obligation is to educate the pupils

with the values of Zionism. This includes the yearning for Zion and for the establishment of a country. The principal of the school is Mr. Tzvi Neeman. A program for all the grades was created that includes the major elements in the history of religious Zionism and the establishment of the state of Israel. In an effort to make the study into an experience, the school established a "Center for Zionism." This provides active educational surroundings, including a "platform" for research and study with exhibits and dramatic activities. The tools and the different models in the center are matched to the capabilities of the pupils and their ages, and they are meant to be used actively during the lessons.

THE CHAIN OF HALACHA

How Much Wine Must One Drink? - by Rabbi Yosef Tzvi Rimon, Rabbi of Southern Alon Shevut and a teacher in Yeshivat Har Etzion

A cup of wine used for a blessing must contain one "revi'it" – 86 cc according to the approach of Rabbi Chaim Na'eh (the gematria, the numerical value, of the word "kos," cup, is 86) or 150 cc according to the Chazon Ish (the gematria of "kos hagnun," a substantial cup). Is it necessary to drink the entire contents of the cup?

According to the Talmud, "Rabbi Huna says in the name of Rav, and the same is taught by Rabbi Gidel from Neresh: One who recites Kiddush and drinks an entire mouthful has fulfilled his obligation, but if not, he has not fulfilled the obligation" [Pesachim 107a]. This would seem to be the same as the requirement for all wine drunk in conjunction with a mitzva. The Tosafot explain that the term "a full mouth" refers to an amount such that if transferred from side to side in the mouth gives the appearance of a full mouth. This means that the required amount is different for every person, such that "for Og, King of the Bashan, more liquid is required." For a normal person, the measure of "a full mouth" is the majority of a "revi'it," that is, 44 cc according to Rabbi Na'eh. This is slightly less than a quarter of a normal glass, and it has been accepted by the Shulchan Aruch (271:13).

There are different rules for the cups of wine used for different mitzvot.

The Cup Used for Havdalah and for the Grace After Meals

The absolute minimum is more than half of a "revi'it," but initially it is best to drink a full "revi'it," because of matters related to the laws of reciting a blessing after drinking wine. The sages disagreed about the minimum amount that obligates one to recite the blessing after drinking wine. The Rambam writes that the minimum is a "revi'it" (Hilchot Berachot 3:12), while the Tosafot write that the minimum is "a full mouth" (Berachot 39a). Others feel that the minimum amount is the size of an olive. Therefore the ROSH writes that one should be wary of drinking any amount of wine that is between an olive and a "revi'it," since the blessing is then in doubt. This has been quoted by the Shulchan Aruch (190:3).

If a person drinks only "a mouthful" for Havdalah or for the Grace After Meals, he will have fulfilled the obligation of the blessing but he will not know if he should recite the blessing after drinking wine. Thus, the best practice is to drink a full "revi'it" and then recite the blessing. One who drinks less than this should not recite the blessing, since a blessing is not recited in a case of doubt. In Kiddush, this is no problem, since the blessing after drinking wine is not recited in any case for Kiddush, which is immediately followed by a meal, so that the wine will be covered by the Grace After Meals (174:6). Thus, as written above, it is sufficient to drink "a mouthful" for Kiddush (44 cc).

It should be noted that there are some people who mistakenly think that for Kiddush it is necessary to drink more than half the cup. But this is not so. The only time that there is an obligation to drink more than half of the existing cup of wine is on Pesach, at the Seder, and even then there is a difference of opinion (see below). It is sufficient to drink more than half of a "revi'it" for Kiddush, no matter what the size of the cup.

Four Cups at the Seder

The commentators disagree if the relevant minimum is to drink "a mouthful" or if there is a special rule that at the very least most of each cup must be drunk. Thus, it is best to make sure that the cups used in the Seder are not much bigger than a "revi'it." It is then relatively easy to drink more than half of the cup and fulfill the requirement according to all opinions. After the fact, one who drinks more than half of a "revi'it" has fulfilled his obligation, even if this was not more than half of the cup. (472:9).



צוותי מדע ותורה



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