

# The Weekly 'Hi All' by Rabbi Jeff Bienenfeld

## Parshat Para

The Talmud Yerushalmi (Megila 3:5) draws a comparison between the Four Chapters, ARBA PARSHIYOT, read in the weeks before Pesach and the Four Cups of wine at the Seder. To wit: Just as there can be no intervening Shabbat between Parshat Para and Parshat HaChodesh, the latter must follow immediately after the former, so too, one may not drink an additional cup of wine between the third and fourth cups.

How are we to understand the connection between these two seemingly unrelated halachic rulings? Other more rational explanations have been proposed for not allowing another glass of wine between the last two cups. Raavad and Mordechai are concerned lest it appear we are adding to the Four Cup limit at the Seder. Tos'fot (Pesachim 117b) is concerned that more than one cup of wine after the meal might blunt the taste of the matza whose presence should remain on the palate. However, the Yerushalmi's suggestion appears somewhat obscure. How are the Four Parshiyot relevant to the Four Cups?

Perhaps an answer can be found in

another comment of the Yerushalmi (Pesachim 10:6). There, the reason given for not allowing another cup of wine is the concern that more wine - for obvious reasons - might prevent the Seder participants from appropriately concluding the Seder.

Rashbam (Pesachim 99b) reminds us that the Four Cups of wine represent the four stages of Redemption. The first three (the end of the servitude, the Exodus itself, and the final destruction of Egypt at the Sea) resulted in the complete emancipation of the Jewish People from their Egyptian oppressors. At this point, it would seem quite natural for the people to celebrate with food and drink, and perhaps they did. The danger was that in their drunken stupor, both real and psychological (the thrill of freedom can indeed be quite intoxicating), they would forget that there was yet a final stage of redemption: the accepting of Gd's Torah at Sinai. Hence, to remind us that we cannot allow anything to distract and prevent us from reaching our Torah destination, there can be no drinking, no inebriation, between the 3rd and 4th glasses of wine. We must finish the Seder with the same solemnity and purpose, with the same spiritual exultation and sense of mission as we began on this exalted evening.

Something similar obtains subsequent to Parshat Para (the 3rd Parsha). The ashes of the Red Heifer had the mysterious spiritual capability to purify the individual from TUM'AT MEIT, the intense uncleanness of a human corpse. This cleansing was a necessary prerequisite in order to eat from the Korban Pesach at the Seder. Imagine a person experiencing a total catharsis of body and soul. All impurity is purged. He feels elevated and fulfilled, overflowing with immense joy and rapture. Is there - can there be - anything beyond this? But there is; there's a fourth Parsha, Parshat HaChodesh, when we read, not about the individual, but about the birth of Knesset Yisrael, the great community of Israel. The danger here is this: An individual can become a captive to his own religious unsulliedness, intoxicated by the rarified air atop the great mountain of his own spiritual achievements. And in that glorious state of sanctimonious affirmation, forget, simply forget and choose to be oblivious to, the fact that there is still another Parsha, a final Shabbat before Pesach when the individual Jew is reminded by Parshat HaChodesh that he must join the greater whole, merge his individuality in and for the common good. Only thus, can complete redemption occur.

The challenge in this message is clear. It is not at all easy to take the experience of a newfound and boundless opportunity and immediately subjugate it to a Higher Authority. It is far more tempting to luxuriate in the abandon of unrestricted freedom than in heeding the Divine mitzva. So too, it is so much more comforting to allow your spiritual ego to convince you that you need not participate in the struggles and joys of the tzibur. "Who needs the extra responsibilities and communal burdens. I can do quite nicely on my own, especially after the cleansing ritual of the Para Aduma."

The tragic mistake in both scenarios is stopping short and never aspiring to reach the 4th Cup and the 4th Special Parsha. Our journey toward redemption is arrested. We become distracted, giddy with limitless freedom and self-righteous purity and fail to see the true "endgame" of our great destiny.

May the weeks ahead and Pesach itself encourage us to make the complete journey, finish our Seder with intimations of immortality and earn the realization of a Messianic era in our own lifetime. 🙌