

## Four Cups of Healing

Whether wine or grape juice, so many people love the *Arba Kosot*, the four cups. They punctuate the Seder nicely. The first is the Kiddush wine, the second cup comes after we have told the story but before the meal, the third is after the *Birkat Hamazon* (Grace after Meals) and the fourth is at *Nirtzah*, the end of the Seder evening. The cups offer structure to a long meal and discussion. But what exactly is the symbolism of four cups themselves?

Those who studied at day school or Hebrew school probably learned that the cups are a reminder of the four expression of redemption which God instructed Moses to tell the enslaved Jewish People in Exodus 6:6-7:

Therefore say to the Children of Israel: I am the Lord, and I will BRING you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will DELIVER you from their slavery, and I will REDEEM you with an outstretched arm, and with great judgments. And I will TAKE you to Me for a people, and I will be to you a God; and you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.

Redemption is usually understood as rescue, salvation, or deliverance. This could be theological (as in redemption from sin), economic (the Torah speaks of redeeming land or homes which have been lost in transactions) or in a physical sense. The plain sense of the expressions in Exodus suggests God's deliverance of our people from Egyptian slavery. But is there a healing message beyond the impending National Redemption of our people? The Jerusalem Talmud (Pesachim 37), offers the traditional explanation, but then teaches us that in Psalms, the term *kos* (cup) is used four times to describe the cups of comfort and healing God offers to us in the face of our sorrows and woes. Even in the worst of times, God reassures us of healing and redemption. We are not alone.

On another level, the Maharal of Prague reminds us that Redemption is a process. Sometimes it is slow and sometimes more rapid. But we are assured that even when it seems agonizingly slow, it is in motion. In fact, says the Maharal, this is why wine or grape juice, rather than, say, four steaks, symbolizes the redemption of Exodus relived during the Seder. A good single steak may taste delicious but hits your stomach fairly quickly. As far as four steaks, well don't even ask! Wine or grape juice on the other hand, nourishes us and gladdens us gradually, reminding us again about redemption coming slowly, as a process.

The Jerusalem Talmud passage teaches us that redemption has different dimensions. It is easy to understand redemption in the national sense, as the Exodus narrative teaches us. But the cups in Psalms quoted by the Talmud remind us that redemption can be personal and healing as well. All of us can strive to find a higher level to our lives.

As the Psalms' "Cups of Comfort" remind us, redemption ultimately has a healing quality. In spite of the difficulties we face in dealing with illness, loss, caretaking,

addiction, we are assured that God is right there with us, giving us the strength and ability to move our way through the process of redemption. But we need to drink the cups; we need to invite God to help us and heal us. God offers us healing and redemption from Above by giving us the capacity to help make it happen.

We have seen this in the thousands of years of Jewish History. But the Torah tells us this can be a part of our personal lives as well. May the One Above shower you and your loved ones with an enriching, healing, and redemptive Passover. And may your four cups be cups of comfort and joy!

Ashira, our children, and grandchildren join me in wishing you a freilichen, zissen, and kosher Pesach!

Rabbi Joseph S. Ozarowski