

# The Song of the Grapevine



גִּפְן אוֹמֶרֶת: כֹּה אָמַר ה' בְּאֶשֶׁר  
יִמָּצֵא הַתִּירוֹשׁ בְּאֶשְׁכּוֹל וְאָמַר אֵל  
תִּשְׁחִיתֶהוּ כִּי בִרְכָה בּוֹ כִּן אֶעֱשֶׂה  
לְמַעַן עֲבָדֵי לְבִלְתִּי הַשְׁחִית הַכֹּל.  
(ישעיה סה, ח)

The grapevine says: “So says Hashem, in the same way wine-bearing grapes are found on a cluster and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, as there is blessing within it’, so shall I act for the sake of My servants, not to destroy all.”

Grapes are amongst the most prominent of fruits. They grow in abundant clusters, each grape filled with sweetness and colored in rich hues. Grapes can be fermented to produce wine, which adds both jubilation and significance to festive meals. Joyous Jewish occasions and ceremonies, such as Birkas Hamazon, Kiddush, Havdala, Bris Mila, and marriage, are all commemorated specifically with a glass of wine. Not only does wine gladden people, it also gladdens Hashem Himself. It is the sole fruit product offered upon the altar in the Bais Hamikdash as an accompanying libation to every Korban. Only when it is poured do the Levites play their music and sing to the Creator.<sup>1</sup>

Wine is not always a blessing. In its song, it is referred to as “tirosh”. The Sages explain that this word has the root “Rosh”, which can mean either “leader” or “pauper”.<sup>2</sup> If one drinks wine with wisdom and in good measure, it uplifts the spirit, expands the mind, and brings delight and enjoyment of life. However, if misused, it can loosen discipline and morals, bringing about the opposite: foolishness, sin, poverty, and destruction. Some opine that the primordial forbidden fruit-tree that Adam and Chava partook of, bringing the concept of death to the world, was a grapevine, from which they drank wine.<sup>3</sup> Later on in history, it was wine that brought Noach shame when he began to replant the new world. That is why, before we drink this potent beverage, we say, “L’chaim” – “To life!”<sup>4</sup>

The existence of the grapevine in Hashem’s world testifies to His belief in our essential goodness and our ability to utilize His blessings appropriately. Its song is about how, in the dismal period of Jewish history prior to the destruction of the first Bais Hamikdash, Hashem criticized the Jewish nation sternly, yet He declared that He would not destroy them entirely, for the sake of the righteous amongst them. He compared the nation to a grapevine grown for wine, in that even if it carries only one solitary cluster of grapes, and the wood of a grapevine is in itself useless, still, the farmer will maintain it for the sake of whatever grapes it produces. The grapes themselves are immature and will undergo a long process of tending, harvesting, squeezing, and fermentation

<sup>1</sup> ברכות לה.

<sup>2</sup> יומא עו:

<sup>3</sup> בראשית רבה יט, ה

<sup>4</sup> כל בו, כה, ברכת המזון

until they become wine, yet the farmer foresees the hidden blessing. So, too, Hashem focuses on the good of His nation, places faith in their ultimate return to Him, and finds satisfaction in each generation.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of days, the righteous will drink from the promised “Yayin Hameshumar”, divine wine aged to perfection since the beginning of history. Then, the grapevine’s song will reach its crescendo. Yet, even throughout the most hopeless parts of Jewish history, the grapevine sings: “So says Hashem, in the same way wine-bearing grapes are found on a cluster and one says, ‘Do not destroy it, as there is blessing within it’, so shall I act for the sake of My servants, not to destroy all.”

### *Living with Song*

We, the Jewish people, are likened to a grapevine and it is one of the seven acclaimed species of our land. Its song is also ours. We should live according to its message, seeing the good in life, and being content with our lots. And we should remember that all blessings are similar to wine in their possible utilization for either good or bad. We have been given the free choice to either harness the world correctly and reveal its Creator within it, or to misuse it and cause the opposite.

Hashem is willing to focus on our essential goodness, and patiently wait for our gradual rectification. We, too, should be just as willing to overlook the faults of our fellow Jews. Search for the goodness within your family, students, employees, or anyone under your influence. Recognize the pure core of every descendant of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, and excuse human imperfections. Love every Jew as yourself. We are all part of one grapevine.<sup>6</sup>

When all the grapes of our nation are harvested and its wine is produced, then the blessing, joy, and song that will come from it will fill the world. Until then, we should see the good in everyone and the song of the grapevine will be heard even today.

L’chaim!



<sup>5</sup> ע"פ רד"ק, שירת החיים, ובית האלוקים, הגר"ח קנייבסקי, ועוד מפרשי נ"ך ופרק שירה. The *Siach Yitzchak* explains that just like grapes are cultivated for their wine, even though many misuse it, and only some drink in healthy measure, so too Hashem will save a city for the sake of the righteous who will utilize it correctly.

<sup>6</sup> See חולין צב.