

## CHAPTER 2

### BIBLICAL AND RABBINICAL POSITIONS ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF WINE

In 1 *Divrei Hayamim* 27: 27, it is related that David had an official who was in charge of "the produce of the vineyards for the wine-cellars." Archaeologists have also found special jars from the times of the First Temple used for carrying wine which was brought as a tax. This complements the many Biblical passages which demonstrate the importance of wine in Israel's economy.

Nevertheless, already in this period there were several groups which opposed the consumption of alcohol. The *nazirim* took an oath to abstain from certain products and activities, including wine drinking. The *kohenim* who served in the Temple were also forbidden to drink since the abstention from alcohol was considered a unique expression of holiness.

The house of Rekhev also abstained from wine. According to their father's instructions they abstained from drinking wine and alcohol, and they even avoided planting vines for the sake of their fruit (*Yirmiyahu* 35: 1-10). These early movements developed as a response to the negative effects of alcohol abuse.

Jewish *halakha* sets up a boundaries around the drinking of wine, so that a person will know how to properly use wine and avoid its weaknesses and dangers. Judaism attributes wine with several positive characteristics, among them medicinal properties. It plays a central role in most celebrations; *Kiddush*, *havdala*, the Passover Seder, weddings, *brit mila*, and *pidyon haben* are all based on use of wine. On holidays, the commandment "ושמחת בהגיך" if fulfilled by drinking wine, as it is written: "Wine pleases the heart of man" (*Tehillim* 104:15). Furthermore, in mourning, wine relieves pain: "Give drink to the one who lost, wine to the bitter of soul" (*Mishle* 31:6).

*Rava* states in the Gemara that wine makes a person aware, and the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* gives this positive yet cautious assessment: "Wine strengthens natural warmth and improves digestion and removes unnecessary materials...[But] one whose mind is weak should be wary of wine as it will add to his weakness and fill his head with fog...Wine is good for the elderly but bad for the young...and one should keep away from wine until the age of twenty one." (*Siman* 32). In many places, the Bible denounces drunkenness (*Bereshit* 9:21-23; *Yeshayahu* 28; *Hoshea* 4:11; *Yoel* 1:5; *Mishle* 23: 30-31 and 31:4-5). In *Yalkut Shemoni*, it is written, "The one who drinks and his body is weak and his mind wanders, wine enters and evil comes out... Guard yourselves from wine because wine leads to bad things...Praised is the person who is not enthused by wine."

In *Menorat HaMaor* by R' Yitzhak Avraham, it is written: "Wine is like a food of which small amounts are beneficial but large amounts are harmful...The one who gets drunk destroys his body, loses his wits, and causes all of the evils in the world, like we find by Noah to whom wine caused evil, being the reason he cursed his progeny."