



Diabetes & Arba Kosos

One of the important Mitzvos of the Seder is drinking the *Arba Kosos*, the Halachos of which are elucidated at the beginning of *Perek Arvei Pesachim* (117b). Rashi explains that the four *Kosos* correspond to the four expressions of *Geula*¹.

Most people fulfill this Mitzva with relative ease and enjoyment. However, there are those – particularly diabetics – for whom the Mitzvos of *Arba Kosos* (and *Matza*) pose a serious challenge and who need to carefully prepare so that they can fulfill the Mitzvos of the Seder. Pregnant women who are advised to refrain from drinking alcohol and women with gestational diabetes who must restrict their carbohydrate intake and do not even drink grape juice may also have significant difficulty fulfilling the Mitzva of *Arba Kosos*.

In this essay we intend to provide a broad overview of the topic to offer guidance and practical Halacha.

1. The Type of Wine

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*O.C.* 472:11-12) rules that it is a Mitzva to procure red wine, unless the white wine available is of a higher quality. A person also fulfills his obligation if he uses pasteurised wine (*Yayin Mevushal*) and *Kunditon*².

Red wine is preferable either because it reminds us of the blood of the Jews in *Mitzrayim* or because it is considered a more distinguished beverage. As stated, the *Shulchan Aruch* rules that if the white wine is of a higher quality, it is preferable. The *Poskim* add that if a person dislikes the taste of red wine, he may choose to drink white wine instead (though some recommend that he color it with some red wine, in which case he should pour the white wine into the red to avoid violating the *Melacha* of *Tzvia* – coloring).

Although there is a preference for non-*Mevushal* wine, the *Mishna Berura* (*ibid.* 39) rules that if the available non-*Mevushal* wine is inferior, a person may drink the *Mevushal*. It is preferable to use non-*Mevushal* wine to fulfill the opinion of the

¹ *Shemos* 6:6-7

² A type of spiced wine



Rambam (*Hilchos Shabbos* 29:14) who rules that the wine for Kiddush must be fit for the *Nesachim* (libations) on the *Mizbe'ach*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*O.C.* 272:12) cites the *Rambam's* view. Therefore, although the *Minhag* is not in accordance with the *Rambam*, it is preferable to take his view into account. It follows that grape juice, which is pasteurised, is not as suitable as wine for fulfilling the *Mitzva*.

There is an additional reason that grape juice is inferior to wine with regard to *Arba Kosos*. The *Arba Kosos* are supposed to be drunk *Derech Cherus* – in a manner of liberty and freedom. *Tosfos* and the *Rashbam* (*Pesachim* 108b) rule that in order to fulfill the *Mitzva* of *Simchas Yom Tov* a person is obliged to drink “*Yayin haMesame'ach*” – wine with an alcoholic content which gladdens the heart. Therefore, the same should be applied to *Arba Kosos* – in order to fulfill the condition of *Derech Cherus* a person must drink *Yayin haMesame'ach* (*Pri Megadim, Mishbetzos Zahav*, end of *O.C.* 472 and *Pri Chadash O.C.* 483 citing the *Maharchash*). Rav Moshe Feinstein *zt"l* disqualified grape juice for *Arba Kosos* for these reasons.

Nevertheless, it is widely understood that those who find it difficult to drink wine, or those who will find it difficult to fulfill the other *Mitzvos* of the *Seder* because of the wine, may use grape juice instead. Rav Ovadia Yosef *zt"l* (*Chazon Ovadia*, 2, p125) related that it was preferable for him to use grape juice as he could not drink wine “*Derech Cherus*”. This was also the custom of the Brisker Rav *zt"l*, the Tchebiner Rav *zt"l* (as attested by Rav Moshe Sternbuch *Shlit"a – Teshuvos v'Hanhagos* 2:243), and the *Chazon Ish zt"l* (*Sidur Pesach k'Hilchaso* 3, footnote 25 citing R' Chaim Kanievsky *Shlit"a*).³ Their position is particularly applicable to women who have no obligation to drink wine to fulfill *Simchas Yom Tov* (see *O.C.* 529).

To understand the basis of this *Halacha* we will examine the words of the *Shulchan Aruch* (*O.C.* 472:10):

A person who does not drink wine, either because it causes him harm or because he dislikes it, must force himself to drink it to fulfill the Mitzva of Arba Kosos.

The *Shulchan Aruch's* source is the *Gemara* in *Nedarim* (50) which relates that R' Yehuda b'R' Ilai and R' Yona would “*bind their heads until Shavuot*” due to the *Arba Kosos!*

³ These opinions are all cited in *Piskei Teshuvos* 472.



The *Mishna Berura* explains that the “harm” referred to by the *Shulchan Aruch* is the discomfort of drinking wine and the headache that results. It does not mean to include a person who will become bedridden due to drinking *Arba Kosos*, as that could not possibly constitute *Derech Cherus* (*Sha’ar haTziyun*).⁴

Rav Elyashiv *zt”l* pointed out that the argument that causing a person to become bedridden does not constitute *Derech Cherus* should also apply to a person who dislikes wine and who forces himself to drink it. It is therefore difficult to understand why the *Shulchan Aruch* expects a person who dislikes wine to force himself to drink it.

In any case, these arguments serve as the basis to permit those who find it difficult to drink wine, to use grape juice instead. If possible, the grape juice should be mixed with wine.

Regarding those with diabetes – it may be better to drink dry wine than grape juice which is replete with fruit sugars. We will discuss this in greater detail below.

2. Raisin Wine

Raisin wine is inferior even to grape juice for *Arba Kosos*. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*O.C.* 272:6) rules that a person may make Kiddush on raisin wine, but the *Rema* qualifies that the raisins must have retained some moisture before they were soaked. If raisin wine is acceptable for Kiddush, it would also be acceptable for *Arba Kosos* (*Radvaz* 1:479, *Taz O.C.* 472:10, and *Mishna Berura ibid.* 37 in the name of the *Acharonim*). However, since it has no alcoholic content, it is inferior to wine.

How is raisin wine prepared?

Raisins that are still moist enough to squeeze out some liquid should be checked carefully to be sure that they are free of Chametz. They should then be soaked in hot water with a detergent and rinsed several times. Following the rinsing, they should be placed in hot water – with an equal ratio of water to raisins – and left for at least three days (see *Taz O.C.* 202:10 and *Magen Avraham ibid.* 27), or boiled up again (as explained by the *Kneses haGedola O.C.* 1 and others). When soaking the raisins, one should press them daily and, at the end of the soaking, squeeze them for

⁴ In last week’s essay we discussed this question from the perspective that a *Choleh sheEin Bo Sakana* may be exempt from *Mitzvos Asei*.



the wine. The volume of water in respect to the raisins must be such that the beverage has a taste of wine (*Biur Halacha* 272, s.v. "Mekdashin"). Raisin wine made in this manner is acceptable for *Arba Kosos*.⁵

3. *Chamar Medina*

If a person is unable to drink wine or grape juice, he may use *Chamar Medina* – an important beverage that is widely consumed in that country. This is codified by the *Shulchan Aruch* (O.C. 272:9):

*In a place where wine is uncommon, some say that one may make Kiddush on beer or other beverages aside from water. Other say that one may not do so.*⁶

What constitutes *Chamar Medina*?

The Gemara (*Pesachim* 107a) cites date beer as an example of *Chamar Medina*. Beer produced from more expensive fruits would certainly qualify as *Chamar Medina* – in fact, any type of beer may be used according to the *Beis Yosef* (O.C. 272).⁷ The *Rema* (O.C. 182:2) asserts that beer is the best form of *Chamar Medina*.

Unfortunately, the alcohol content in beer presents an issue for diabetics. We therefore need to consider other forms of *Chamar Medina*.

There is a dispute among the Poskim as to whether coffee, tea, or milk constitute *Chamar Medina*. The *Halachos Ketanos* (1:9) maintains that a beverage can only be considered *Chamar Medina* if it quenches thirst and intoxicates. Therefore, coffee, tea, and milk would not qualify (see *Birkei Yosef* 296:2). The *Mishna Berura* (*ibid.* 25) rules that milk is not *Chamar Medina* because it is not drunk as a beverage [though today that is no longer the case]. The *Maharsham* (*Da'as Torah*, O.C. 296:2) rules that there is room to consider milk as *Chamar Medina* (where it is customarily used as a beverage) as it is slightly intoxicating. The *Aruch haShulchan* (O.C. 272:14) rules similarly. Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l (*Igros Moshe*, O.C. 2:75) concluded that milk

⁵ See also *Shulchan Shlomo* (1, 272:2) and *Chazon Ovadia* (1:1:6).

⁶ See also the *Rema* O.C. 182:2

⁷ The Poskim consider beer produced from wheat or barley as the best form of *Chamar Medina* – though it is obviously Chametz.



and tea should only be considered *Chamar Medina* in very pressing circumstances.⁸ Rav Ovadia Yosef *zt"l* held that only beer is acceptable as *Chamar Medina*, but not coffee, tea, or fruit juice.

[Some Poskim disqualify *Chamar Medina* for *Arba Kosos*, as “*Ein Shira Ela Al haYayin*” – songs and praises of Hashem should only be made on wine. However, this is not the position of the *Rema* (O.C. 283) as evident from the *Mishna Berura* (272:37).]

Therefore, it is preferable that a diabetic not use *Chamar Medina* as *Arba Kosos* and, as will be discussed below, he should be *Yotzai* Kiddush through somebody else who is drinking wine.

Those who follow the Ashkenazic custom of reciting a Bracha on each of the *Arba Kosos* should not do so when using *Chamar Medina*. Since *Shehakol* is recited rather than *haGafen*, a Bracha is only appropriate for the first and third *Kosos*.

4. Diluting Wine

If a person finds it difficult to drink wine, he may dilute it with water. He must ensure that the mixture comprises [at least] 51% wine and that it tastes like wine. (However, he must clarify how much the wine was already diluted by the producer.) There may even be room to be lenient and dilute it by up to two-thirds if the mixture retains the taste of wine.

5. The Shiur of Arba Kosos

The *Kos* must hold a *Revi'is* of wine (*Shulchan Aruch*, O.C. 472:9, and *Mishna Berura* *ibid.* 29), which is the volume of an egg and a half including the shell. There are two well-known views of the *Shiur*. According to the *Tzlach* (*Pesachim* 116b), *Gra* (*Ma'asei Rav* 74), *Chazon Ish*, and many Poskim, the eggs today are half the size of those of the times of *Chaza"l*. Therefore, the *Shiur* of *Revi'is* is the volume of three eggs, which is 150 cc (slightly more than 5 fluid ounces). The *Mishna Berura* (271:68, and *Biur Halacha* *ibid.* 13) rules that for *Mitzvos d'Oraisa* one should adopt this position, but for *Mitzvos d'Rabbanan* a person may adopt the smaller *Shiur* of one-and-a-half eggs. Since *Arba Kosos* is a *Mitzva d'Rabbanan*, one may be lenient, though

⁸ Rav Moshe did not discuss using milk or tea for *Arba Kosos*, however, considering that he disqualifies grape juice for *Arba Kosos*, it is likely that he would similarly have disqualified milk or tea. Those who are lenient with regard to grape juice, may likewise consider milk or tea as *Chamar Medina*.



it is better to be stringent if possible. A diabetic should certainly adopt the smaller *Shiur* (though for Kiddush – which is based on a *Mitzva d'Oraisa* – it is better to use the larger *Shiur*. Therefore, a diabetic should be *Yotzai* Kiddush from somebody else who is using a large *Shiur*, and then drink a smaller *Shiur*.)

It is preferable to drink the entire *Revi'is* (*Shulchan Aruch, O.C. 472:9* and *Mishna Berura ibid. 30*). Unlike Kiddush during the year, which only obligates a person to drink the majority of a *Revi'is*, the *Arba Kosos* have an additional requirement of "*Shesiya*" – drinking the *Kos*. However, it is sufficient to drink the majority of a *Revi'is Bedieved* (and certainly in the case of a *Choleh*), though it is necessary to drink the majority of the *Kos*. It is recommended to use a small *Kos* so that one needn't drink more than is necessary.

For example, if a diabetic is instructed by his doctor not to drink more than 164 cc of wine at the Seder, he should drink the majority of a *Revi'is* for each *Kos* – 44 cc. He should use a *Kos* that holds precisely a *Revi'is* so that by drinking the majority of the *Kos* he doesn't drink more than he is permitted.

If he is able, it is preferable to drink an entire *Revi'is* for the fourth cup, so that he will be able to recite a *Bracha Acharona*. If not, he should be *Yotzai* the *Bracha Acharona* from others (Rav Yehoshua Neuwirth *zt"l* cited by the *Nishmas Avraham 472*).

6. A Person Unable to Drink Wine

Some⁹ say that if a person has been instructed by his doctor to avoid drinking wine, he may rely on the *Rishonim* (*Tosfos, Pesachim 99b s.v. "Lo Yifchesu"*) who hold that a person can fulfill the *Mitzva* of *Arba Kosos* via the mechanism of *Shomea k'Oneh*. He should listen to somebody else recite the *Bracha* (who intends to be *Motzi* him), and, if he can, drink a little of the wine.

7. Summary & Instruction for Diabetics

- It is important to point out that a diabetic can sometimes be considered a *Choleh sheYesh Bo Sakana*. He shouldn't ignore this and should consult with his doctor before the Seder as to what he should do.

⁹ See the *Sefer v'Aleihu Lo Yibol* (p176) citing Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l* and *Chazon Ovadia 1:1:4*.



- The Seder also includes the Mitzvos of Matza and *Shulchan Orech*, which can also prove harmful to a diabetic because of the carbohydrate content. It is important to remember that *Min haTorah* it is enough to eat only one *Kezayis* of Matza (and take the Matza's carbohydrates into account).
- During *Shulchan Orech*, he should avoid any foods and drinks that are harmful to him.
- It is preferable to drink dry wine rather than grape juice which is full of fruit sugars.
- He can dilute the wine by a half.
- He may use a Kos which contains 86 cc and drink most of its contents for each of the Kosos – 44cc. In general, this will allow a diabetic to fulfill his obligation.
- If his doctor has forbidden him to drink any wine at all, he can make raisin wine (see above).
- *Bedieved*, he may use *Chamar Medina*. He should consult his Rav about what constitutes *Chamar Medina* today. We should point out that many drinks that could constitute *Chamar Medina* contain a large amount of sugar.
- If he is unable to use raisin wine or *Chamar Medina*, he should be *Yotzai* the *Arba Kosos* through *Shomea k'Oneh* (and drink a little of the wine, if possible).
- If he is unable to do any of the above, he is exempt from the Mitzva of *Arba Kosos*. Even a *Choleh she'Ein Bo Sakana* is exempt from *Arba Kosos*, and this would certainly apply to a diabetic.
- Some Poskim advise diabetics who are dependent upon insulin injections (that are dosed according to their blood sugar and carbohydrate intake) to eat and drink normal *Shiurim* of matza and wine at the Seder and inject themselves with insulin corresponding to their blood sugar and the carbohydrate load.