

# Shabbat Without Wine

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## Shabbat Without Wine

The Talmud (Pesachim 106a) teaches

Remember (the Shabbat) over wine. This is one of the halachic sources for Kiddush, and also, as the Gemara points out, connects to havdala as well. But what if you are an alcoholic and your recovery requires that wine be abjured? While obviously one can fulfill these Mitzvot with Grape Juice (or challa for Friday night and possibly chamra d'medina for Shabbat day and havdala), how can one fulfill the spirit of "Remembering Shabbat over wine?"

Last December, I attended the winter JACS retreat. JACS stands for Jewish Alcoholics, Chemically dependant persons, and Significant others. It is the national organization for Jews in Recovery from addictions. For the record, JACS events are not for outsiders. However, rabbis are welcome because of the spiritual and leadership role we play in the community, and because of our ability to intervene when necessary. We are there to learn as well as to provide spiritual support to those participants who need it.

There were over 250 people there. The clientele was diverse – Chasidim with shtreimlekh, Reform, Conservative, non-affiliated and everyone in between. There were men, women and teens. This was a real representation of Klal Yisrael.

There are those who criticize the "12-step movement as being too "Christian". What I saw was a celebration of Shabbat, of Jewish life in the face of a life-sapping illness, and how the "Higher Power", Hakadosh Barukh Hu, along with the resources of Torah and the Jewish community, can actually help people who need it the most.

While there, I heard the heart wrenching stories of people struggling with various addictions, the terrible effects on their families. And I heard how they found Torah resources, Jewish spiritual strength and each other's hisuz guiding their recovery. I encountered one woman whose family was well known to me while I was a pulpit rabbi. She shared how her ex-husband and son were addicts, and how her formerly happy frum Jewish home was now torn apart by alcohol and drugs. She had come here for support; anxious and troubled, she poured her heart out to me. I spent 45 minutes offering what hisuz I could. I do not know what I did for her, but she gratefully told me at the end, "Perhaps the reason why Hashem brought you here was to listen to me and support me."

One moving keynote story came from a young man, an alumnus of Chareidi Brooklyn Yeshivot. He was already doing and dealing hard drugs in High School, and on the street by age 18, stealing for his crack and heroin habits. He thought his parents had abandoned him as a "bad seed" since he had not heard from them all along. He was taken in by a veteran JACS macher and through this organization was able to find his path to Recovery and sobriety as well as rediscover his own Yiddishkeit. But the surprise was at the celebration on his first anniversary of sobriety. His parents were there; they had been following his downslide as well as his recovery

all along via the JACS mentor! He remains clean, sober, and close to his folks.

One particular presentation was the “count-down”, where years in which participants began sobriety were called out. All who could stand up and declare this were applauded. Some had maintained themselves for years, even decades. Others were more recent. The biggest applause, however for was the call, “All who had been clean for 24 hours!” One individual Jew, in a pony-tail, had checked in to the retreat stoned. We had all seen this. And after one day of sobriety, the entire hall cheered him on with the chant, “Keep coming back! “Keep coming back!” I pray he does.

For me, though, the most poignant moment was during the inspired dancing after Havdala. About halfway through, I broke down in tears. I have led celebratory Havdalas before but this was different. These wonderful individuals, using the wisdom of the Torah and the 12-Step movement, were somehow able to overcome the horrors they had experienced, celebrating Shabbat and life. They were truly able to Remember the Shabbat, but not with wine.

We are kidding ourselves if we think this deadly disease is “someone else’s”. These people are our family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, students and congregants. It is up to us, the rabbinic leadership of the Jewish community, to reach out, to offer shul space and support to those afflicted with the illness of addiction. Together, we can truly sustain the Recovery process of those who need to Remember the Shabbat, but without wine.