

Ad D'Lo Yada

● By Shmuel Silverstein HaKohen

Beor Panecha

part of the K'sod Siach series

It is a well-known custom to drink oneself into oblivion on the festival of Purim. Indeed, festive and historically pivotal wine parties punctuate the narrative of *Megillas Esther*.



Rembrandt, *Ahasuerus, Haman and Esther* (1660), Pushkin Museum, Moscow

This custom of drinking wine on Purim is founded on a Talmudic source, where Rava is quoted (and a phrase from the Yerushalmi is cited) describing how one should drink — specifically wine — until one can no longer discern between cursing the bad and blessing the good characters of the Megillah, and vice versa.

MEGILLAH 7B

מִי־חַיִּיב אֵינִי לְבִסּוּמִי בְּפֻרִיָּא עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין
אֲרוּרָה הָמָן לְבְרוּךְ מֹרְדֵּכַי

A person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until he does not know the difference between “cursed is Haman” and “blessed is Mordechai.”

Interpretations allow for variations on drinking to this extreme. These include such practices as losing consciousness awareness by falling asleep. Nevertheless, inebriation is more common.

The larger objective is to be *mevatel* — to nullify — one’s rational ability to discern, or to think discrimi-

nately. This practice, known as *Ad D’Lo Yada*, literally translates to “until you don’t know.”

The custom presents a rare opportunity for the hyper-rational Jew to suspend critical, analytical thinking, resulting in an altered state. And what characterizes such a condition? Generally, a state of irrationality, defaulting to an instinctive, unvarnished perspective — *beyond reason*.

The result is a state where the mind is no longer an obstruction, or an arbiter.

Ironically, when one arrives at this state, one has actually achieved a place of “knowing” — of “blind” (drunken) faith, without doubt. *Doubting* itself is a rational process. Inebriation incapacitates the rational process, thus eliminating doubt.



If one were to write out this phrase, *Ad D’Lo Yada*, in Hebrew — אֲד דְּלֹא יָדַע — and place a finger in the middle of it, one may discover an embedded message. Cover the middle four letters, and leave the first two and the last two letters exposed.

These four letters may now reveal: אֲד ... יָדַע — *Ad ... da*. This “mirrored image” presents a pair of *exact opposites*, much like Mordechai and Haman.

This phrase, with its middle so obscured, could be translated as “*until one knows*.”

When you become so drunk as to lose the ability to discern between good and evil, when you come to rely on instinct, *that* is when you *know* — without (rationally) knowing, much like a child knows the absolute connection, the unquestioning knowledge, of their mother.

That is when one has achieved the state of *Ad D’Lo Yada*. *That* is when one truly *knows* — without (rationally) knowing. And when one reaches that state, one can be said to have fulfilled this ancient custom.

This strange and seemingly incongruous Jewish practice allows the participant to suspend thought, and to allow in what is left. When one cannot comprehend some esoteric concept, one resorts to disbelief — or belief — because it is simply beyond reason. And that is just the point here.



Unquestioning belief is what we yearn for, but more so at certain times, such as when we pray.

We commonly strive to have focus — *kavanah* — with complete surrender when we recite the most devotional and foundational phrase, *Shema Yisrael*. This represents our proclamation and affirmation of the Oneness of Hashem. This phrase also serves as a testimony, an *eidus* — from Israel to Hashem, and from Hashem to Israel (Tur).

DEVARIM 6:4

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל ה' אֶלֶּקֶינוּ ה' אֶחָד

Hear, O Israel: Hashem is our God, Hashem is One.

In fact, there are two enlarged letters in this phrase, which spell עֵד — *eid*, witness — or, reversed, דַּע — *da*, know. These same elements are contained within the phrase *Ad D'Lo Yada*.

Shema Yisrael also refers to G-d as *Hashem Elokeinu*, just as in the first of the Ten Commandments: *Anochi Hashem Elokecha*...

Interestingly, *Hashem Elokim* is also the Name used for G-d in Bereishis 3:9–11, when the question *Hamin ha'etz* — “Have you eaten from *the* tree...?” — is posed, just after Adam and Chava *knew* they were naked (and Adam would then *know* his wife), and had to *hide* from His presence.

BEREISHIS 3:11

הֲמֵן הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִיךָ לֵבְלֹתִי אָכַל מִמֶּנּוּ אָכַלְתָּ

Have you eaten from the tree from which I commanded you not to eat?

This type of enhanced *knowing*, now involving *rational thought* — required for the ability “to choose,” *bechirah* — supplanted their state of perfect communion once they ate from the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil.



The Midrash (Esther Rabbah 9:2) attributes the fifty-*amah* (cubit) tree, which Haman and his “loved ones” had prepared to hang the goodly Mordechai, as alluding to this very Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil from the Garden.

Note how the definite article הַ — *Ha'etz*, **the** tree — is employed in the Megillah *only* when referencing *this* tree. (There is another tree cited in the Megillah, which does not employ the definite article.) The definite article is also employed regarding the *Etz HaDaas*: *Ha'etz*, **the** tree of the Garden.

In Esther 5:14 and 7:10, “the tree” ultimately served as the gallows upon which the evil Haman took his last breath. Thus, this same tree, once intended for evil — to hang Mordechai — served a purpose for good: to hang Haman. Thus, the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil.

ESTHER 7:10

וַיִּתְּלוּ אֶת הָמָן עַל הָעֵץ אֲשֶׁר הָכִין לְמֹרְדֵּכַי

So they hanged Haman on the tree that he had prepared for Mordechai.

Perhaps this metaphor — Haman’s gallows alluding to the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil — points to a theme of Purim (the Gra): to employ the faculty of free will, *bechirah*, making the right choices, and to unquestioningly recognize Hashem’s presence in everything we do, wherever we go, even when He appears hidden.



And just what type of fruit do our Rabbis believe the Tree of Knowledge bore?

Contrary to popular opinion, the Tree of Knowledge — *Eitz HaDaas* — was *not* an apple tree. There are four predominant opinions as to what type of fruit it was (Berachos 40a): fig, wheat, *esrog* (citron), and grapes.

For the purpose of this discussion, let us pick grapes as our forbidden snack.

Thus, after eating of the grapes — from which wine is derived — from the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil, the first couple was summarily expelled. Then Adam

“knew” — *yada* — his wife, and she would give birth to a new life.

By eating of the Tree, they also internalized the *yetzer hara*, the evil inclination, along with the enhanced ability to discern good from evil (Bava Basra 16a; Sforno on Bereishis 2:1). They suddenly felt naked, no longer enjoying that pure, angelic status in perfect communion with Hashem. *They also acquired mortality.*

Thus, drinking wine on Purim until one’s ability to reason is *mevateil* — nullified — and one is **no longer able to discern** between good and evil *takes us back to the status of Adam and Chava in the Garden — prior to their eating of a wine product from the Tree of Knowledge, Good and Evil.*

We are thus practicing a reversion to that pure, unadulterated state the first couple enjoyed prior to their own sinful, original “imbibing”: a pure state of belief and connection, without the filter of discernment employed by an egotistical and rational mind.

So on Purim, *we employ the same vehicle* that got us to this rational, “knowing” status in the first place — *wine* — which may well have originated in the *Eitz HaDaas*. It is a yearning to return to a state of perfect peace and ecstasy as enjoyed in the Garden, from which *we* originated.

Thus, *Ad D’Lo Yada* allows us to suspend our super-rational selves. This “enhanced” status simulates that same status of not *knowing* (rationally), in which the first couple basked *prior* to partaking of the forbidden fruit: *wine* — *yayin*.



Yayin — יַיִן, wine — and *sod* — סוֹד, secret — share a common numerical value, a *gematria* of seventy (Sanhedrin 70b). *Yayin* has been known to be a facilitator in revealing enticing secrets.

It is through *yayin* that one suspends that capability, to achieve — even temporarily — an unfiltered, released state, facilitating a different pathway in connecting to Hashem, much like Adam and Chava once organically knew, without the rational process to get in the way.

Suspending that noisy rational process, just for the occasion, by imbibing the very fruit — *yayin* — as drawn from the *Eitz HaDaas*, brings us back, before we *knew*, to when we did not “know”: *Ad D’Lo Yada*.

It returns us to a status with a diminished ability to discern: simply bask, believe and enjoy. It is just another way — a *derech* — to come closer to Hashem, and to what He originally intended for us.

L’Chaim, and a happy Purim! **BP**

Dedicate a month of Beor Panecha in honor or memory of a loved one: beorpanecha.org/about

info@beorpanecha.org • BeorPanecha.org

© J.S. Silverstein

Scan to read online: beorpanecha.org/a6675

