

Exemptions from Drinking Wine

Q: What are the options for someone who cannot or does not want to drink four cups of wine or grape juice?

A: First, I would like to list the reasons for not drinking wine or grape juice. Wine is a problem for people who are not used to consume alcohol in high quantities, recovering alcoholics, people who suffer from allergies, and those who avoid wine for health or moral reasons. Grape juice is a problem because of the high levels of sugar in the juice.

While there are those who hold that drinking four full cups is an unavoidable obligation, there are some options for those who might suffer as a result of drinking. As I have shown in previous posts, it makes no difference whether the suffering is physical or emotional, and whether it is temporary or permanent.

1. You could drink of each cup only the minimal amount required. The minimal volume of a cup is Revi'it, which has been calculated to be at least 75cc or 2.5 fluid ounces. The minimal amount for drinking is the majority of a cup, which is 38cc or 1.3 fluid ounces.ⁱ
2. Those who cannot drink even that amount can either sip a little from their cup, as a symbolic act, or rely on the blessings and actions of the person who conducts the Seder.

This second option is based on the words of the Mishnah and the interpretation of the Mishnah by the Tosafot. I have also witnessed it in the Seder of my grandfather, Hakham Shaul Fetaya, who would drink the majority of the cup himself, but would let the participants drink whatever they felt comfortable with, or not at all.

The Mishnah I am referring to is found in the tenth chapter of tractate Pesachim and it says the following: “one should not be served less than four cups of wine”ⁱⁱ

In the commentary of Tosafot on the Talmud we find the following interpretation: It seems that one is served by his children or wife. Those who serve him do not have to drink, and he

represents them with his cup. It is a logical argument, since on every Shabbat one person does Kiddush for all others.ⁱⁱⁱ

R Nathan Gestetner comments that although the conclusion of Tosafot is that each one has to drink four cups, it is presented as stringency, rather than as an essential halakha. He explains that the Tosafot's opinion is that the person who conducts the Seder can cover for the participants.^{iv}

R Hayyim David HaLevi further explains that while eating Matzah is a biblical commandment, having four cups of wine is only a component of setting a table with a luxurious meal. According to the Tosafot, he says, the four cups are analogous to the Kiddush. Just as one can fulfill the obligation Kiddush by hearing someone else, so also he can fulfill the obligation of the four cups.^v

Conclusion:

If one cannot drink four cups of wine or grape juice, he or she can either drink the minimum amount, which is 1.3 fluid ounces, or rely on the blessing of the person who conducts the Seder.

ⁱ הרב אליעזר מלמד, פניני הלכה פסח, ט"ז, ליל הסדר ח-ט, שיעור היין והכוס-שיעור השתייה: לפי חישובים מדוייקים התברר שהוא 75 מיליליטר... צריך לשתות לכל הפחות שיעור רוב רביעית

ⁱⁱ משנה פסחים י, א: ולא יפחתו לו מארבע כוסות

ⁱⁱⁱ תוספות פסחים, צט:ב, ד"ה ולא יפחתו: מתוך הלשון משמע קצת שאין נותנין לבניו ולבני ביתו כי אם לעצמו, והוא מוציא את כולם בשלו. וסברא היא, דמאי שנא ארבע כוסות מקידוש דכל השנה שאחד מוציא את כולם.

^{iv} הרב נתן גשטטנר, שו"ת להורות נתן, חלק ב סימן כח: דמסברא סבירא להו להתוספות דאחד מוציא את הרבים ידי חובתם במצות ארבע כוסות, ורק משום חומרא הצריכו כוס לכל אחד ואחד. ומשמע דלא ברירא להו מעיקר הדין שלא יוכל לצאת ידי מצוה זו על ידי חברו

^v הרב חיים דוד הלוי, כתב העת הליכות, 102-103, עמ' 5-6: והמהר"ל הביא דברי תוספות הנ"ל וכתב: ולא הבנתי דבר זה דלא שייך שיהיה מוציא את אחרים בד' כוסות, דמאי שנא ממצה ומרור... ותמיהה המהר"ל על התוספות צריכה עיון קצת, שכן חיוב "אכילת מצה ומרור מפורש בתורה כידוע, ואילו ארבע כוסות עיקר החיוב בהם לשיטת תוספות עריכת הסדר ולא השתייה דווקא. ולכן השוו ארבע כוסות לפי שיטתם לקידוש, שהעיקר בו הקידוש וכל השומע יוצא ידי חובתו ואין שתייה מעכבת בו