

“Noach, the man of the earth, debased himself and planted a vineyard. He drank of the wine and became drunk.” (9:20-21)

In the *Midrash*, *Chazal* comment regarding the word “*vayochel*,” which is related to “*chullin*” – “*Nischalel v’naaseh chullin*,” “he desecrated himself and became unholy.” Why? Because he planted a vineyard. He should have planted something else. We infer from *Chazal* that the actual planting of the vineyard was in itself a deficiency in Noach’s spiritual stature. His drunken stupor was the result of this deficiency, an offshoot of his previous error – planting the vineyard. We must endeavor to understand the severity of this “sin.” Wine can be—and is—used also for a more lofty purpose. *Chazal* say: “*Ein simcha b’lo yayin*,” wine is a critical component in expressing joy during a celebration; “*Yayin yesamach levav enosh*,” “wine gladdens the heart.” Wine was poured as a libation on the *Mizbayach*. We use it every week for *Kiddush* and *Havdalah*. Why was Noach so harshly criticized for planting a vineyard? Furthermore, as stated by the *Baal HaTurim*, Noach obtained the shoot for this vineyard from *Gan Eden*, the same place where Avraham secured the shoot for his famous “*Eishel*.” Noach and Avraham emulated the actions of Hashem, Who planted a tree in *Gan Eden*. In other words, Noach’s planting the vineyard was a constructive endeavor, filled with holiness. Why is his action any different than that of the Patriarch Avraham? *Horav Shlomo Goldvicht, z.l.*, explains that the foundation lies in the beginning: What is the first thing, the very first action, that Noach did as he commenced his activities in the post-Flood era? How did he initiate his service to Hashem? The first thing that Noach did upon arriving on dry land was to plant a vineyard. The population of the world had been destroyed. It was starting over again. In a sense, Noach was like Adam – the first man in a new world. Every one of his activities was to carry enormous significance. *Targom Onkelos* understands the word, “*vayachel*,” as “*v’shari*,” which means “and he (Noach) began.”

As Noach is about to enter the *Teivah*, Hashem told him to take whatever food he would require during the Flood and its aftermath. He took everything that he considered essential – grain, vegetation, and fruits. He would need bread; he would also need wine to drink, to offer for sacrifices, to make people happy. The world certainly was in need of wine, but was that the primary item needed? True, wine is necessary for *korbanos*; it gladdens the heart. However, wine also inebriates, causing people to act in a manner unbecoming their status. The first planting, the very first action that Noach undertook in a new world, should have been free of any impropriety. It should have been untainted, not carrying with it the risk of catalyzing sin. The “*reishis*,” beginning, should have been special. This was Noach’s error. A world founded and, consequently, built on a platform of “*gefen*,” the fruits of the grape, has by its nature an impediment, an opportunity for debasement.

The concept of a tone set by beginnings can be seen in another context: Referring to our archenemy, Amalek, Bilaam calls him, “*reishis goyim*,” “the first among the nations” (*Bamidbar* 24:20). This is a reference to the fact that when we left Egypt, proud, excited, nervous, filled with awe after the incredible revelation of the Almighty’s awesome power, one

nation was the first to have the audacity to attack us – Amalek. It was at a time of heightened love between *Klal Yisrael* and Hashem, “*ahavas keluloseinu*,” the love of a bride and a groom. It was our beginning as a nation. Amalek came with *chutzpah*; he was the first, setting the tone of enmity against Hashem’s People. He was the first, during our beginning. This incursion can never be rectified, it can never be forgiven.