



PARSHAS VEZOS HABRACHA – THE FULL CUP OF BLESSING MR JOEL BERMAN, CHOSSON TORAH

The centerpiece of a Jewish ceremony is usually a glass of wine. Weddings, circumcisions, *kiddush* on the Sabbath — all make use of wine, a symbol of joy.

The Talmud (*Berachot* 51a) teaches that this cup of wine should be filled to the brim: "*Whoever says the blessing over a full cup is given a boundless inheritance*" and "*is privileged to inherit two worlds, this world and the next.*" The Sages derived this reward of a "*boundless inheritance*" from Moshe's blessing to the tribe of Naphtali before his death: "*He shall be filled with G-d's blessing, inheriting (land) to the west and to the south*" (Deut. 33:23).

Why is it important to fill the ceremonial glass to the brim? Why should this act grant us boundless riches and an inheritance in this world and the next?

The Pursuit of Riches

One might think that if we sincerely desire to live life according to our true spiritual goals, then we should make do with only our barest needs. We should distance ourselves as much as possible from the distracting pursuit of luxuries. And yet, the desire for an expansive lifestyle is ingrained in human nature. It is natural to delight in greater wealth, nicer homes, and fancier cars. There must be some inner purpose to this innate human nature.

In fact, the pursuit of riches is only a negative trait when its sole objective is self-gratification. Wealth and material possessions serve no purpose if there are acquired only for our own personal benefit. But if we utilize our energy and joy of life for that which is good and proper, then it is unnecessary to restrict these natural tendencies. On the contrary, a generous and kind-hearted individual can accomplish many more good deeds when he is blessed with wealth.

A full cup of wine represents an abundance of riches. The Sages praised filling a wine-glass to the brim — on condition that the glass is a "*kos shel berachah*", a ceremonial cup used for *mitzvot* and good deeds. With such a 'cup of blessing,' it is proper to pursue a life of wealth, as we recognize that these material blessings are a vessel, a tool to perform *mitzvot* and help others, both physically and spiritually.

Boundless Inheritance

One who pursues riches only for his own physical pleasure has set for himself very limited goals. How much joy can all the pleasures of the universe generate, when they are confined to one individual? But one who seeks financial success in order to help others — there is no end to the benefit of the wealth he acquires. Therefore, the Sages taught that such an individual is blessed with a "*boundless inheritance.*"

In addition, if we recognize that G-d is the source for all blessings, then being showered with material wealth helps us develop the important trait of gratitude. Our resolve to serve G-d and help others is strengthened, and we become loyal emissaries of G-d in spreading kindness in the world.

Inheriting Both Worlds

For most people, there is a clear dichotomy between physical and spiritual pleasures. This world and the next are separate, even competing, realms.

But if our love for this world is based upon the good that we can benefit others, then the pursuit of material riches is also a spiritual pursuit, and there is no longer any contradiction between the love of this world and the World to Come. Life in this world becomes a spiritual life, filled with the pure ideals of loving-kindness and generosity. This is "*the inheritance of two worlds*" that the Sages ascribed to one who fills his *mitzvah* wine-glass to the brim.

The celebration of completing the Torah is therefore the celebration of a completed spiritual input into an otherwise wholly physical world, void of meaningful purpose. May we start the New Year with a stronger spiritual grounding. *Vezot Habracha* — this is the true blessing in life: a physical world, driven by spiritual principles.

Sources:

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