

olam ha-zeh v'olam ha-ba:
This World and the World to
Come in Jewish Belief and Practice

Studies in Jewish Civilization
Volume 28

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Purdue University Press
West Lafayette, Indiana

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Greenspoon, Leonard J. (Leonard Jay) editor.

Title: *Mishpachah : the Jewish family in tradition and in transition* / edited by Leonard J. Greenspoon.

Description: West Lafayette, Indiana : Purdue University Press, [2016] | Series: *Studies in Jewish civilization* ; 27 | Contains papers presented at the 28th Annual Klutznick-Harris-Schwalb Symposium, October 25-26, 2014, in Omaha, Nebraska. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016016885 | ISBN 9781557537577 (pbk. : alk. paper) | ISBN 9781612494685 (epdf) | ISBN 9781612494692 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Jewish families—Congresses. | Domestic relations—Religious aspects—Judaism—Congresses. | Jews—Cultural assimilation—United States—Congresses.

Classification: LCC HQ525.J4 M56 2016 | DDC 306.85/089924—dc23 LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016016885>

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Tasting Heaven: Wine and the World to Come from the Talmud to Safed

Vadim Putzu

INTRODUCTION

Until recently, in Italian family restaurants it was customary to find, hanging on the walls, a plaque that pictured two monks standing by a barrel, mugs in their hands. The picture was captioned with the saying: “In heaven there is no wine, so drink up while you are on earth!” In addition to encouraging patrons to have a drink while at the restaurant, this sign also teaches us that, according to Italian folk wisdom, one of the features that characterize the hereafter, as opposed to the present world, is its absence of wine. What is the situation as far as the Jewish tradition is concerned? Can wine help us distinguish between the *olam ha-zeh* and the *olam ha-ba*?

What follows is a short investigation of wine as it is represented and employed in relation to the world to come in kabbalistic literature and in some rabbinic texts. It will be argued that an analysis of the ways in which the rabbinic sages and, most prominently, renowned kabbalists (such as the authors of the *Zohar* [Book of Splendor], Joseph Karo, and Moses Cordovero) pictured and/or used wine gives us an intoxicating taste of their perspectives about this world and the hereafter alike. More specifically, the stage will be set by first showing how rabbinic descriptions of wine mirror, on the one hand, their authors’ preoccupation with the *olam ha-zeh*: both winemaking and this worldly existence require much toiling; the joys we can derive from them need to be regulated and confined to holy times; both can easily end up in degradation and sin. On the other hand, according to the rabbinic sages, the wine of the *olam ha-ba* is deprived of all of its negative aspects: it is easy to make, abundant, and gladdens without ever leading to sinful drunkenness—thus coming to represent the very delights that characterize existence in the world to come.

Kabbalists further contributed to the development of this picture by variously elaborating on the role of wine drinking for the sake of earning one’s place in the hereafter. In this regard, the second and main part of this study contends that, while Karo’s insistence on the importance of abstention and the Zoharic author’s recommendation to imbibe the symbolic wine of Torah signal their negative perception of this world, Cordovero’s strategic



Italian popular plaque with wine-drinking monks. The text translates as: “In heaven there is no wine. Let us drink it while on earth!” Courtesy of Christina Forest.

emphasis on the significance of preserving wine from Gentile contact for the sake of reaching the *olam ha-ba* reveals much about his overall plan for the *olam ha-zeh*.

THE PLACE OF WINE IN (PREMODERN) JUDAISM

The topic of wine in Judaism has, until recently, received little scholarly attention, especially for what concerns the medieval and early modern periods.¹ However, the current state of studies does not reflect the peculiarly important role of wine in Judaism and Jewish history. For our purposes, it is worthwhile to briefly highlight the ubiquitous presence of this beverage in various aspects of Jewish life in premodern times:

- As food, wine constituted one of the basic ingredients of the biblical² and the medieval meal,³ providing an important caloric intake and reputedly stimulating appetite and digestion.⁴
- In the medical field, wine was widely employed and was credited with many beneficial properties,⁵ including that of sanitizing drinking water.
- As an occupation, wine production and trade represented a significant activity from both a religious and an economic viewpoint.⁶ Moreover, vintage and winemaking activities must have employed, at least for limited periods, most members of the Jewish community.⁷
- In the area of worship, wine was—and still is—an essential element of several rituals that characterize both the regularly recurring holy days (Sabbath, Passover, Purim, etc.) and some special lifecycle events (such as circumcision and marriage).⁸

Connected to this latter aspect in particular is the role that wine has performed, since biblical times, as an indicator of a specific socio-religious identity⁹ and/or ethnicity.¹⁰ In this sense, the act of (not) drinking (a certain type of) wine has served both to distinguish Jews from non-Jews,¹¹ and to establish an internal differentiation within the Jewish population itself.¹²

The important and conspicuous presence of wine in many dimensions of Jewish existence has also facilitated its use as a metaphor and a symbol, as is apparent already in the Tanakh. Ever since its first biblical attestations, this beverage is characterized by a fundamental symbolic ambivalence, inasmuch as it is associated with prosperity and beauty on the one hand, but also with debauchery and sin on the other.¹³ As we shall see, this alternation between positive and negative connotations of wine as a symbol or metaphor can also be found in rabbinic literature and among kabbalists.

FOR A JEWISH CULTURAL ENOLOGY

The above-mentioned ubiquitous presence and important role of wine in multiple realms of premodern Jewish life, combined with certain general features of this beverage (variety of colors, aromas, and flavors; mind-altering effects; integration of natural and cultural components), conferred to it a distinctive status within Judaism. This has resulted in its prominent use as an ambivalent symbol throughout Jewish history.¹⁴ Following from this recognition, the present study argues that the attitudes premodern Jews maintained toward wine

provide a smaller-scale reflection of their perspectives on broader ideological and existential issues (in our case, their assessment of the nature and state of this world, and their expectations and plans for the hereafter). This is a contention that—within certain historical and geographical limitations—allows for an anthropology of wine within Judaism or, rather, for a Jewish cultural enology.¹⁵ Accordingly, investigating the attitudes of Jewish authors toward wine may contribute to elucidating more fundamental elements in their mentalities, highlighting larger similarities and differences in their general religious and cultural outlooks.¹⁶

IS THERE WINE IN THE WORLD-TO-COME?

In the above-mentioned sign warning customers about the lack of wine in heaven, which used to camp in many Italian popular restaurants, this beverage is singled out and employed to characterize the afterworld in opposition to the present one. Here, Italian culture expresses its perspectives on this world and the hereafter by appealing to one of its most popular and central products—wine. Quite similarly, premodern Judaism, for which wine also held a very important role, used this beverage to depict the *olam ha-ba*, voicing its concerns for the *olam ha-zeh* in the process.

Jewish representations of the afterworld in vinous terms appear in many classic texts of rabbinic literature. For example, in the Talmud we find: “The world to come is not like this world. In this world there is the trouble of harvesting and treading [of the grapes], but in the world to come a man will bring one grape on a wagon or a ship, put it in a corner of his house and use its contents as [if it had been] a large wine cask, while its timber would be used to make fires for cooking. There will be no grape that will not contain thirty kegs of wine.”¹⁷ The rabbis’ portrayal of the world to come through references to winemaking is one of leisurely existence and abundance. At the same time, this life of ease and plenty is presented as being radically different from the ordinary existence of the rabbinic sages in this world. From their depiction of the *olam ha-ba*, it appears that the rabbis of the Talmud perceived that the life they were living was marked by scarcity and uncertainty. One needed to do much toiling in order to achieve very little and could never be sure that she would succeed in reaping the fruits of her hard work.

The notion that, according to the rabbinic sages, this worldly existence is characterized by insecurity and risk can also be evinced from their descriptions

of the effects of wine on those who drink it in the *olam ha-zeh* as opposed to what will happen in the *olam ha-ba*. If, on the one hand, the Talmud states that, after the destruction of the Temple, the joys man can experience in this world can come only from the heart-gladdening effect of wine,¹⁸ on the other hand, the rabbis variously declare that these same wine-induced pleasures need to be regulated and confined to holy times, inasmuch as they can all too easily lead one to degradation and sin.¹⁹

Some rabbinic texts explain the fact that the unavoidable threat of pleasure slipping into debauchery is an inherent trait of human existence in the *olam ha-zeh* by portraying the origin of the post-Edenic world as an act of (excessive) wine drinking. For example, one midrashic tradition attributes Adam and Eve's "original sin" to wine, as it claims: "That [forbidden] tree from which Adam ate was a vine, for nothing else but wine brings woe to man."²⁰ According to this text, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil was a grapevine, and therefore wine was the substance responsible for interrupting the paradisiac life of man's progenitors in the Garden of Eden and for plunging them into the uncertain and dangerous condition that is this worldly existence.

Interestingly, when presenting wine in the *olam ha-zeh* and the human condition its consumption has engendered in rather ambivalent terms, the rabbinic sages also envisage a radical reversal of this situation in the *olam ha-ba*. As one text puts it: "The Holy One Blessed be He said: 'Since in this world wine is a problem to the world, in the future to come I will turn it into [a bearer of] joy.'²¹ Unlike ordinary wine, the wine of the world to come brings about all of the positive and none of the negative effects it ordinarily has on its drinkers. In this, this special beverage epitomizes the extraordinary existence—all joys, no problems—that awaits those who have earned their portion in the hereafter, and it is thus indicated as the eschatological reward for the righteous.

Indeed, according to various passages, those deserving to return to the Garden of Eden in the messianic age will drink "the wine which has been preserved in its grapes since the six days of Creation."²² In dealing with wine and the afterworld, the rabbis establish a reverse parallel between the existence of mankind in its protological and eschatological state. Just as wine drinking drove the first humans out of the Garden, causing them to forfeit their Edenic condition for a this worldly one (which the production and consumption of this beverage come to exemplify), the act of imbibing a unique vintage, stored in Eden since before the time of Adam and Eve's transgression, will characterize the otherworldly state of those living in the *olam ha-ba*.²³

THE WINE OF TORAH

What is this extraordinary wine, preserved in its grapes since the six days of Creation, which awaits the righteous in the world to come? Considering the fact that, due to the technological limitations of the premodern period, wine could not be preserved for any length of time, it appears that the rabbinic sages did not conceive of this afterworldly drink as a variety—no matter how special—of the actual beverage, but rather used it to signify the delights that characterize existence in the hereafter.

Medieval Spanish kabbalists appropriated these rabbinic traditions and ideas about wine and the world to come, and they further contributed to developing the characterization of the “wine preserved in its grapes since the six days of Creation” and to defining the role of the actual beverage in facilitating or impeding man’s earning of their portion in the *olam ha-ba*.

As for the former contribution, both within the *Zohar*²⁴ itself and in other Hebrew writings associated with the Zoharic circle,²⁵ the special vintage kept in store for the righteous is described, much like in rabbinic literature, as the gladdening nourishment that typifies existence in the Garden of Eden and the world to come. Furthermore, building on the equivalence between wine, Torah, and secret that had been established by the rabbis,²⁶ these medieval Spanish kabbalists identified the heavenly liquid “preserved in its grapes since the six days of Creation” with the deepest scriptural secrets that will be revealed to the upright in the hereafter.²⁷ The picture of the kabbalistic *olam ha-ba* that emerges from this peculiar wine–Torah association is that of a scholar’s paradise, where all the mysteries of the universe are finally unveiled and in which the righteous, for whom the ultimate delight is esoteric knowledge, can at last make sense of it all.

That afterworldly existence for the meritorious will involve engaging with (the wine of) Torah is confirmed by a Zoharic passage expounding on the Song of Songs, where good wine is contrasted with “another wine that is not good”:

Rabbi Yitzhak opened, saying: *Your mouth like choicest wine, flowing smoothly to my beloved* (Song 7:10). *Your mouth like choicest wine*—this is the wine of Torah that is good, for there is another wine that is not good,²⁸ but the wine of Torah is good for all, good for this world and good for the world that is coming. And this is the wine that pleases the Blessed Holy One more than all. And by virtue of

this, he who is saturated with the wine of Torah will awaken to the world that is coming and will merit to arise to life when the Blessed Holy One shall raise the righteous. Rabbi Yehudah said: *Rousing [dovev] the lips of sleepers* (Song 7:10)—for we have learned that even in that world he will merit to ply Torah, as it is written, *causing the lips of sleepers to move*.²⁹

Here the *Zohar* views Torah as a wine that brings joy and intoxicates, arousing the drinker's senses when it is ingested: "The quest here is to be saturated with the wine of Torah, filled with the divine plenty, the flow of divinity, through learning or, more literally, through imbibing and internalizing words of Torah."³⁰ The "good wine" of Torah transforms human consciousness, awakening the learner to a state of mystical awareness of the divine dimensions of reality and of the world to come. The effect of inward transformation triggered by wine would almost suggest its use as a mystical tool, were it not for the fact that here we are dealing not with the actual beverage, but with a "drinkable" symbol of Torah.

Given that, as is apparent from other passages, the Zoharic author viewed real wine as an all-too-dangerous beverage for the humans of this world,³¹ it seems clear that the text above encourages the consumption of Torah, not actual wine, for the sake of deserving a spot in the afterworld. Why would the *Zohar* want to undermine wine consumption in this manner? While it has been proposed that the passage discussed above should be seen as an attack on medieval Andalusian Hebrew poetry and its glorification of promiscuous wine parties,³² let us suggest here two alternative avenues of interpretation.

First, if we frame this statement within the intellectual context of thirteenth century Jewish Spain, then its invitation to replace wine with Torah could be viewed as an echo of the devaluation of the material in favor of the spiritual championed by philosophers such as Moses Maimonides (Rambam).³³ In this sense, acknowledging the complex influence of Maimonidean philosophy on the *Zohar*,³⁴ we could regard the aforementioned text as an appropriation of the Rambam's ascetic ideal of spiritual perfection and his quest for freedom from bodily needs and pleasures.³⁵

Second, if we consider the immediate non-Jewish historical and socioreligious environment surrounding the likely author of the passage above, then its call to Torah for the sake of the hereafter over and against wine could function as a pronouncement in defense of the traditional Jewish values of education and scholarship vis-à-vis Christian doctrines and their supporters. At a basic

level, to the extent that medieval Spanish Kabbalah can be seen as a particularistic reaction to philosophical universalism and its potential assimilationist threats,³⁶ the *Zohar's* urging Jews to devote themselves to Torah instead of indulging with wine—the most popular social lubricant of the day—amounts to advocating for Jewish separateness and distinction, as well as to criticizing dangerous convivial interaction with Gentiles. At a more specific level, by insisting that it is the internalization of Torah, not the ingestion of wine—as Christians claim—that has salvific value (it gets you “high,” awakening you to the afterworld), this Zoharic text might be polemicizing against the doctrine of the Eucharistic transubstantiation, which the Church officially adopted in the early thirteenth century.³⁷

Overall, it appears from our analysis that the *Zohar's* manifold strategy of discouraging actual wine consumption in this world for the sake of the *olam ha-ba* bespeaks a rather negative perception of the *olam ha-zeh* as a place where a Jew's existence is constantly threatened by desire, be it the craving for material and bodily pleasures or the attraction to esoteric knowledge and foreign ideas.

DRINKING IN AND OUT OF EDEN

As our summary investigation of the kabbalistic representations and uses of wine in relation to the world to come shifts from the medieval to the early modern period, the remainder of this study will consist of presenting, comparing, and contrasting the perspectives of Joseph Karo and Moses Cordovero, two central figures of the mystical renaissance that took place in Safed around the middle of the sixteenth century. As we focus on the differing ways in which these two kabbalists conceived of the role of wine drinking for the sake of earning one's place in the hereafter, it is imperative to keep in mind that Karo and Cordovero shared a peculiar common heritage and audience. Not only did they study together in Safed, but they were also both part of the wave of Jews who, after the expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula and the outward conversion of many to Christianity, decided to move to the land of Israel with the intention to return to Judaism and atone for their sins.

WHERE THERE IS WINE, THERE IS NO TORAH

Joseph Karo (1488–1575 C.E.) is one of the most senior characters among a number of important authors who were active in Safed around the middle of

the sixteenth century.³⁸ Having abandoned the Iberian Peninsula in the wake of the expulsion, he lived in Egypt and Turkey before arriving in Safed in 1536/7. A towering figure in matters of halachah, Karo studied Kabbalah with his younger colleague, Solomon Alqabetz, and was also associated with Cordovero.³⁹ His kabbalistic ideas about wine and the afterworld are contained in *Maggid Meisharim* [Mentor of Uprightness], a mystical diary Karo apparently kept for most of his life.

From this work we learn that the author was visited by a *maggid*, a spiritual being who inspired him to lead a morally pure and ascetic life. Karo's *maggid* would appear at nighttime, when he would study the Mishnah, and require that the kabbalist divorce himself from ordinary life and all material sensations to focus his thought exclusively on Torah and commandments. The appearance of the *maggid* was contingent upon Karo's engagement in practices of self-mortification, which included sleep deprivation and, especially relevant for our purposes, abstention from eating and drinking to satiation.

Much like the *Zohar*, which suggests that in order to reach the *olam ha-ba* one should imbibe Torah instead of wine, Karo's *maggid* states:

What you have done is not good, as you drank a lot tonight. And even if it was diluted, indeed by drinking much you weaken your body. . . . But if you will always beware from wine, you will be happy in this world, and the world to come will be good for you, for you will be a dwelling and a nest for Torah: always cleave to it without pause so as not to give room to the impure side to rule over you at all.⁴⁰

Going against Jewish (and non-Jewish) medical tradition, which maintained that wine is by and large beneficial to the human body, here Karo argues that this beverage actually weakens the body. In this sense, renouncing wine is good for man's existence in the *olam ha-zeh*, insofar as its avoidance serves as a medical recipe for happiness. Moreover, the author of this passage suggests that abstention from wine allows man to be filled with Torah, a condition that earns him a place in the world to come.

The fact that in this passage the "room" one makes in one's being through self-denial can then be filled by Torah presents us with yet another variation on the correspondence between wine and Torah already encountered in rabbinic and Zoharic materials. Instead of expressing the coincidence between the two entities, as was the case in the examples mentioned above, here the equivalence between wine and Torah is employed to suggest that they are in fact mutually exclusive. As a result, while in most cases this association results in a positive

connotation for wine, here the correspondence functions as an opposition. While in the *Zohar* the effects that wine produces on its drinkers could still serve as positive descriptors for the experience of “filling up” on Torah, for Karo even as literary metaphor this beverage can function only as a negative equivalent to Torah.

Wine appears to be incompatible with Torah because of its connection with the side of impurity and, as we learn elsewhere in Karo’s text,⁴¹ with man’s malevolent instinct. Accordingly, alongside other ascetic practices, avoiding wine helps man to subdue evil while making one’s self fit for the divine. In this sense, our kabbalist’s acts of self-denial for the sake of undermining his evil instinct constitute both a means of purification and an offering to God.

Here it should be noted that, according to Karo, it is this malevolent urge that drives mankind toward the satisfaction of their everyday needs, the fulfillment of their earthly desires, and the pursuit of material pleasures. Therefore, inasmuch as he views all objects (wine being an example) of these this-worldly needs, desires, and pleasures as receptacles for the forces of evil, Karo’s perspective on the *olam ha-zeh* and on human existence therein appears decidedly negative. Moreover, his recommendations for earning one’s portion in the *olam ha-ba*, which involve an intensely ascetic regimen intended to negate the material and human in favor of the spiritual and divine, toward ultimate self-sacrifice, can be seen as an example of Jewish response to the Spanish expulsion.

As scholars have argued,⁴² Karo’s life in Safed as a penitent longing for martyrdom must have been inspired by an overwhelming sense of guilt and a desire to make atonement to the point of self-sacrifice. As an exile from Spain himself, this kabbalist seems to have believed that the collective sins presumably committed by the Iberian Jews caused this catastrophe. Even more, he seems to have internalized his community’s supposed responsibility for the expulsion to the point that he understood it as his own, a responsibility for which he had to atone.

A WINE THAT GLADDENS WITHOUT INTOXICATING

Despite the fact that, like Karo himself, Cordovero’s family was almost certainly part of the Iberian Jewish diaspora, and even though the two studied together in Safed for many years, the latter’s treatment of wine in connection to the world to come differs quite markedly from his older associate’s. It is an indication, as will be demonstrated, of a different sort of response to the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula.

Unlike Karo, in his commentary on the *Zohar*, *Or Yaqar* [The Precious Light], Moses Cordovero (Ramak, 1522–1570 c.e.) does not recommend avoiding wine altogether in order to merit one’s spot in the afterworld. Rather, in a lengthy section of this major work, the Ramak sets to schematize and organize the different views on this beverage in earlier Kabbalah.⁴³ He begins by distinguishing between a wine that, having been touched by Gentiles, intoxicates, and a gladdening wine that is untouched by non-Jews. In addition to bringing joy to man and the divine realm alike, the latter wine benefits the human limbs by strengthening them. From this point of view, Cordovero’s attitude appears quite different from Karo’s ascetic position. In fact, the author of *Or Yaqar* recognizes the positive medical effects that wine may have on the human body and appreciates especially its heating and arousing power, which stimulates coupling both in the *olam ha-zeh* and in the world above.⁴⁴

However, for all these positive effects to occur, wine has to be preserved from Gentile contact—it has to be made holy by being kept separate. As a consequence, Cordovero emphasizes the importance of preserving wine from *goyim* [non-Jews]. In fact, being a material, this-worldly product, real wine is particularly prone to impurity and sin, since it can be touched by Jews and non-Jews alike. At the same time, this earthly beverage is connected to the divine realm of the *sefirot* [divine powers], which can thus be negatively impacted by “externals”—that is, non-Jews—touching kosher wine.

As a result, one’s stringency and attention in preserving wine from Gentile contact determines, according to Cordovero, one’s state of purity or sinfulness in this world, as well as her portion in the world to come.⁴⁵ In particular, those who keep kosher wine away from non-Jews increase holiness in the *olam ha-zeh* and are themselves preserved from evil and sin, thereby deserving—so to speak—an express lane pass to the *olam ha-ba* with no stops in *gehenna* [the Jewish version of hell]. In contrast, those who do not guard this beverage with enough care, and defile it, are subjected to the power of the evil inclination and put their portion in the world to come at risk.

On the face of it, Cordovero’s attribution of tremendous consequences to the practices related to the preservation and defilement of kosher wine leaves us with the impression that *yayn nesekeh* [prohibited libation wine] is an urgent and extremely serious issue in his mind. However, when one considers the socio-religious context in which the Ramak is operating—Islamic-ruled Safed—one may wonder whether he is reflecting an actual concern of his time and place or not. How likely were Jews to produce, consume, and/or trade wine with Gentiles (who would most likely be Muslims) in such an

environment? Is Cordovero perhaps reflecting here the concerns of the societal realities represented in his sources—that is, thirteenth century Christian Spain—rather than his own? While I doubt that the latter question can be answered with any degree of certainty, one could still ask why the Ramak is charging with so much significance behaviors related to wine that were probably occurring sporadically at best in sixteenth century Safed.

If one continues to follow Cordovero's discussion of *yayn nesekh*, one gets the impression that, while his acknowledgement of the relationship of wine with evil inclination brings him close to Karo's negative stance about this beverage, his attitude in this matter is actually quite different from his senior associate's—being much more optimistic and constructive. In fact, in another passage, the Ramak specifies that, although wine kindles the forces of judgment embodied by the angel Samael, if it is preserved from Gentile contact, this beverage does not intoxicate and therefore does not arouse anger and sternness.⁴⁶ In this sense, as has been argued above, the act of keeping wine separate sanctifies it, thus nullifying its potentially negative effects. Furthermore, within a section in which he schematizes and orders the issues regarding the preservation of kosher wine, Cordovero emphasizes the exceedingly beneficial effects of keeping this beverage from non-Jews, while limiting the extremely negative consequences of failure to preserve it—defilement in this world and banishment from the world to come—only to those who actually drink Gentile wine. Drinking kosher wine in the company of non-Jews or even drinking Jewish wine defiled by Gentiles only delays, so to speak, one's journey to the world to come, making a pit stop in gehenna necessary for the sake of purification.⁴⁷

As opposed to Karo's sole preoccupation with the negative qualities of wine, which can be minimized and redirected only through severe asceticism (and provided that the beverage is kosher), Cordovero's attitude seems more ambivalent with regard to the drink in general—including non-Jewish wine—and becomes an outright appraisal of preserved wine. In particular, according to the Ramak, it is the practice of keeping this beverage from non-Jews that has a highly positive, “sanctifying” function—rendering beneficial even the otherwise potentially dangerous effects of wine⁴⁸—regardless of the limited consequences of dealing with Gentile wine and despite the (probably scarce) likelihood of interreligious wine exchanges in sixteenth century Safed. Cordovero seems to motivate his insistence on this matter by affirming that preserving kosher wine, even in cases when there is no risk of it being defiled by Gentiles, “adds holiness to the world below.”⁴⁹

In other words, by guarding Jewish wine from goyim, one keeps it separate and thus makes the beverage holy, increasing the amount of holiness in this world as a result. It is very possible that, by emphasizing the positive consequences of keeping kosher wine away from non-Jews, the Ramak is encouraging his coreligionists to uphold with stringency a certain set of halachic rules in a societal situation in which this can be done with relative ease. By magnifying the significance of Jewish legislation regarding wine, which demands separation from Gentiles, in a context where the overwhelming majority of non-Jews would not make use of this beverage anyway, Cordovero seeks to reinforce the religious identity of Safedian Jews by means of a traditional and fairly palatable tool.

If this interpretation is correct, then the Ramak's treatment of the issue of *yayn nesekh* may be inscribed within his project to consolidate Jewish life in the new center of Safed. As Moshe Idel has suggested,⁵⁰ Cordovero's basic goal is to "structure life in terms of mystical and religious meaning," seeking to "secure stability, to celebrate the mystical life as part of the traditional Jewish way of life." In this sense, the Ramak's call for engagement in the practice of preserving wine from Gentile contamination goes against ascetic tendencies (such as those manifested by Karo), which would suggest a retreat from the world and thereby constitute a potential threat to communal life and ritual.

Moreover, if, as Shaul Magid has suggested,⁵¹ the majority of the audience for Safedian Kabbalah was made up of Iberian conversos [Jewish converts to Christianity] and/or their families, then the idea of a redeeming and soteric power that wine would symbolically possess would likely strike a familiar chord with "returning" Jews who must have been conversant with the Christian ritual of the Eucharist. By evoking a symbolic understanding of wine that would especially resound with conversos and reconfiguring its performance as a major expression of Jewish identity with salvific consequences, Cordovero could provide his followers with a significant yet manageable pathway into *teshuvah* [return to Judaism]. In light of these considerations, the Ramak's treatment of the topic of *yayn nesekh* may also be seen in terms of strategic use of a symbolic conception of wine for the sake of mobilizing and reshaping Jewish identities in an inebriating and convenient way.

In conclusion, Cordovero's peculiar perspective on the relationships between kosher wine and the world to come provides us with a window into his perception of the *olam ha-zeh* and of the task of a Jew's existence in it. Unlike Karo, for whom this world is irredeemably sinful, so that human life should be geared only toward the *olam ha-ba* through ascetic purification and

ultimate self-sacrifice, Cordovero views the world he is living in as one that can and should be bettered and sanctified through man's positive action within it. Furthermore, for the Ramak one's bodily existence and active engagement in the material world provide the opportunity for securing a portion in the hereafter. While Karo's outlook on life in this world and the world to come, as it is expressed through his attitudes toward wine, betrays his experience of the expulsion of the Jews from the Iberian Peninsula as a catastrophe that could be atoned for only with extreme sacrifices, Cordovero's perspective on the same issues may be viewed as a different response to this historical event—one that centers on the opportunities that this worldly existence in the land of Israel offered for penitents to return to a Jewish life, to expiate their sins, and to mend the *olam ha-zeh*.

To sum up the findings of our short survey, it appears that, unlike Italian popular culture hanging on restaurant walls, a number of rabbinic and kabbalistic traditions envision an afterworld in which wine—however intended—flows abundantly. On a more sobering note, medieval and early modern Jewish kabbalists urge human drinkers eager to secure a table at this intoxicating, out-of-this-worldly banquet either to imbibe exclusively kosher wine in their earthly lifetime or to avoid the beverage altogether and substitute it with Torah. Exemplifying cultural enology, our analysis of these varied Jewish views on wine in its relation to the world to come, however limited, has afforded us a window into their exponents' vision for the (ultimate) future, along with their outlook on the present. In this regard, the perspectives offered by the *Zoharic* author(s), Karo, and Cordovero in particular resonate especially well with the specific socio-historical conditions (i.e., thirteenth century Christian Spain or post-Spanish expulsion Safed) in which these kabbalists were operating.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS AND PERMISSIONS

This essay is the offspring of a presentation given at the 28th Annual Klutznick-Harris-Schwab Symposium on Jewish Civilization, "*Olam ha-zeh v'olam ha-ba*: This World and the World to Come in Jewish Belief and Practice," in Omaha. I wish to thank all my fellow presenters, and especially our host, Leonard Greenspoon, for partaking of food, drinks, and ideas over those two days in the true spirit of a symposium. Thanks also to John Strong for reading an earlier draft of this essay and for teaching me the American fraternity song "In heaven there ain't no beer / That's why we drink it here / And when we're gone from here / all our friends will be drinking all the beer." Its

existence indirectly confirms my argument for a cultural enology and calls for an anthropology of beer in America.

NOTES

1. While the literature on wine in the Bible and in ancient Israel is extremely abundant and some important studies on this beverage in the rabbinic period do exist, when it comes to the Middle Ages and the early modern era, to my knowledge the only available scholarly titles are few and far between. See, for example, on vine-related terminology, Immanuel Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* (Vienna/Leipzig: Löwit Verlag, 1926), 1:48–189. On wine poetry in medieval Spain, see Dan Pagis, “‘And Drink Thy Wine With Joy’: Hedonistic Speculation in Three Wine Songs by Samuel Hannagid,” in *Studies in Literature Presented to Simon Halkin* (in Hebrew; ed. E. Fleischer; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), 133–40; Raymond Scheindlin, *Wine, Women, and Death: Medieval Hebrew Poems on the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Michelle Hamilton, et al., eds., *Wine, Women and Song: Hebrew and Arabic Poetry of Medieval Iberia* (Newark: Juan de la Cuesta, 2004). On Jews and non-Jewish wine in medieval Ashkenaz, see Hayyim Soloveitchik, *Principles and Pressures: Jewish Trade in Gentile Wine in the Middle Ages* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2004); Hayyim Soloveitchik, *Wine in Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages: Yeyn Nesekh—A Study in the History of Halakhah* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2008). On Jewish perceptions and symbolic uses of wine, see Giulio Busi, *Simboli del pensiero ebraico* (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), 466–73, 660–62; Louis Grivetti, “Wine: The Food with Two Faces,” in *The Origins and Ancient History of Wine* (ed. P. McGovern, et al.; Amsterdam: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 2000), 3–6, 9–16; Vadim Putzu, “*Il Leviatano . . . si digerisce con il vino*: Appunti sul simbolismo del vino in Menachem Azariah da Fano,” *Materia Giudaica* 15–16 (2010–2011): 365–74; Neomi Silman, *Wine as a Symbol in Jewish Culture* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Me’uhad, 2014). At present, the only near-comprehensive treatments of Jewish wine in the medieval and early modern period are Andreas Lehnardt, ed., *Wein und Judentum* (Berlin: Neofelis Verlag, 2014), 97–202, and Vadim Putzu, *Bottled Poetry/Quencher of Hopes: Wine as a Symbol and as an Instrument in Safedian Kabbalah and Beyond* (PhD diss., Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 2015).

2. For wine as daily nourishment, see Deuteronomy 8:8; 11:14; Proverbs 9:5; 1 Chronicles 12:41. See also, for example, Carey Walsh, *The Fruit of the Vine: Viticulture in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 1–7; David Jordan, “An Offering of Wine: An Introductory Exploration of the Role of Wine in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Judaism through the Examination of the Semantics of some Keywords” (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2002), 10–12; Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat?: Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids: Erdsman, 2008), 27–28.

3. See *Zohar* 3:189b; Hayyim Soloveitchik, “Can Halakhic Texts Talk History?,” *AJS Review* 3 (1978): 154; Soloveitchik, *Principles and Pressures*, 37–39; Hugh Johnson, *Vintage: The Story of Wine* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989); Tim Unwin, *Wine and*

the Vine: An Historical Geography of Viticulture and the Wine Trade (London: Routledge, 1991); John Cooper, *Eat and Be Satisfied: A Social History of Jewish Food* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993), 100–101, 123; Ariel Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death: Jewish Life in Medieval Umbria* (London: Littman, 1996), 74–83; Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari, eds., *Food: A Culinary History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Yann Grappe, *Sulle tracce del gusto: Storia e cultura del vino nel Medioevo* (Bari: Laterza, 2006).

4. See BT *Berakhot* 35b; Moses Maimonides, *Treatise on Asthma* (ed. F. Rosner; Haifa: Maimonides Research Institute, 1994), 32–33; Fred Rosner, *Medical Encyclopedia of Moses Maimonides* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1998), 76, 168; Fred Rosner, *The Medical Aphorisms of Moses Maimonides* (Haifa: Maimonides Research Institute, 1989), 146, 313.

5. See BT *Shabbat* 129a; *Bava Batra* 58b; Rosner, *Medical Aphorisms*, 276, 297, 314; Rosner, *Medical Encyclopedia*, 20, 239.

6. See Soloveitchik, “Can Halakhic Texts Talk History?,” 154; Soloveitchik, *Principles and Pressures*; Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death*, 74–83.

7. See Soloveitchik, “Can Halakhic Texts Talk History?,” 171.

8. See Mishnah *Berakhot* 6:5–6. For post-rabbinic codifications of the rules about ritual use of wine, see Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Sefer ha-Zemanim, Shabbat* 29; Maimonides, *Sefer ha-Maddah, Hilkhoh Yesodei Torah* 9:1; Joseph Karo, *Shulhan Arukh, Orach Hayyim*, chs. 182 and 196.

9. According to Leviticus 10:9 priests should abstain from alcoholic beverages before entering the tent of meeting. This biblical prohibition against priests being drunk manifests a cultic distinction between the former and the rest of the population, just as the Nazirite, who is set apart from the rest of the community in order to consecrate himself exclusively to God, vows to abstain from the grape and all of its products, as well as from any kind of alcoholic drink, at all times (see Num 6:1–21, Judg 13:4 and 14). Rechabites also customarily abstain from wine (Jer 35), and so should kings too, lest under the influence they commit injustice (see Prov 31:4–5).

10. The complex rabbinic regulations concerning *yayn nesekh* [prohibited libation wine], which were first laid out in Mishnah *Avodah Zarah* 2:3–7 and 4:8–5:12, were originally intended to effect a clear-cut separation between the Jews and the nations. On the historical evolution of this legislation in the Middle Ages, see Soloveitchik, *Wine in Ashkenaz in the Middle Ages*.

11. Aside from the prejudice, epitomized in the popular Yiddish song *Shikker iz a goy*, which contrasts sober Jews with drunken Gentiles, one should nonetheless remark that Jewish imperviousness to drunkenness has been proverbial throughout history and has prompted observers, beginning with Immanuel Kant (see Morton Jellinek, “Immanuel Kant on Drinking,” *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol* 1 [1941]: 777–78), to try to explain the “Great Jewish Drinking Mystery.” This phrase describes a phenomenon, studied especially in the 1940s and 1950s (see, among others, Robert Bales, “Cultural Differences in Rates of Alcoholism,” *Quarterly Journal for the Study of Alcoholism* 6 [1946]:

480–99; Donald Glad, “Attitudes and Experiences of American-Jewish and American-Irish Male Youth as Related to Differences in Adult Rates of Inebriety,” *Quarterly Journal for the Study of Alcoholism* 8 [1947]: 406–72; Charles Snyder, *Alcohol and the Jews: A Cultural Study of Drinking and Sobriety* [Glencoe: Free Press, 1958]), whereby alcoholism was almost unheard of among observant Jews, despite their habitual drinking. Scholars (see especially Mark Keller, “The Great Jewish Drink Mystery,” in *Beliefs, Behaviors, and Alcoholic Beverages: A Cross-Cultural Survey* [ed. M. Marshall; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979], 404–14) argued that training in the regular use of wine for ritual and other communal occasions (such as family meals) since childhood confers a sacred dimension on drinking this beverage (and possibly alcohol in general), which in turn generates strong feelings about the inappropriateness of inebriation and effectively eliminates the chances of alcoholism.

12. Interestingly, the rabbinic and medieval regulations concerning *yayn nesekh* have been employed in recent times as internal boundary markers, distinguishing “observant” Jews from non- or less observant ones. For these recent implications, see Silman, *Wine as a Symbol*, 130ff.

13. See, among others, Genesis 27:27–29 and 49:11–12, Deuteronomy 11:14 and 28:39, Jeremiah 48:33–34, Amos 5:11–12, Micah 6:15, Habakkuk 3:17, Zephaniah 1:13, Song of Songs 1:2–4, 2:4–5, 4:10, and 7:3–10.

14. On this aspect, see Busi, *Simboli*, 466–73, 660–62; Grivetti, “Wine: The Food with Two Faces,” 3–6, 9–16; Silman, *Wine as a Symbol*. Wine has represented a peculiar cultural object not only in premodern Judaism, but also in a number of other civilizations, past and present. Scholars from various disciplines have expressed this same idea, emphasizing especially wine’s symbolic dimensions; see for example, Nicola Perullo, “Wine-world: Tasting, Making, Drinking, Being,” *Rivista di Estetica* 51 (2012): 10; Jean-Robert Pitte, *Le desir du vin à la conquête du monde* (Paris: Fayard, 2009); Roger Scruton, “The Philosophy of Wine,” in *Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine* (ed. B. Smith; New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–18; Unwin, *Wine and the Vine*, 7–8.

15. Even though this essay focuses on rabbinic and kabbalistic perspectives on wine and the *olam ha-ba*, and thus is clearly limited in scope, I maintain that its fundamental argument about the epistemic value of studying attitudes toward wine can be successfully applied to other authors, currents, and historical manifestations of Judaism. While concentrating on halachic rather than on kabbalistic sources, Soloveitchik’s work referenced above implicitly shares the same methodological assumption I have just laid out. For an example of “Jewish cultural enology” applied to a seventeenth century Italian author, see Putzu “*Il Leviatano . . . si digerisce con il vino.*”

16. A very similar argument has been advanced by Grappe, who (in *Sulle tracce del gusto*, 159) maintains that in medieval Europe wine represented a cultural prism in which mentalities, practices, and customs were echoed. Writing from an even more general perspective, Unwin (*Wine and the Vine*, 62) has also contributed a similar observation by remarking that particularly when viticulture and wine had taken on religious significance,

their depiction in art and literature might reflect their ideological role. These authors' suggestions pave the way for extending our claim about the ideological import of attitudes toward wine from the particular case of premodern Judaism to religiously oriented civilizations in general.

17. BT *Ketubbot* 111b.

18. BT *Pesahim* 109a; *Ta'anit* 11a.

19. See especially *Leviticus Rabbah* 5:3 and 12:1 on the connection between wine drinking and sexual transgressions. For the notion that unregulated wine consumption may "put a man out of the world," see Mishnah *Avot* 3:11; BT *Berakhot* 29b, 40a, 63a; *Sanhedrin* 70a–b; *Numbers Rabbah* 10:4.

20. BT *Sanhedrin* 70a–b. See also *Genesis Rabbah* 19:5.

21. *Leviticus Rabbah* 12:5.

22. BT *Berakhot* 34b. See also *Sanhedrin* 99a.

23. On the idea that the fruit that brought sin into the world will become a healing in the afterworld, see Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (vol. 5; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1969), 98n70.

24. See for example *Zohar* 2:147a; 3:40a; *Zohar Ḥadash* 64b.

25. This is the case, for example, in the works penned by Moses de Leon and Joseph Gikatilla. For the former, see Elliot Wolfson, ed., *The Book of the Pomegranate: Moses de Leon's Sefer Ha-Rimmon* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 319. For the latter, see Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Oraḥ*, gate 9, sphere 2; Alexander Altmann, "Regarding the Question of the Authorship of *Sefer Ta'amei ha-Mitsvot* Attributed to Rabbi Yitshak Ibn Farkhi" (in Hebrew), *Kiryat Sefer* 40 (1965): 270–71.

26. See BT *'Erubin* 65a; *Sanhedrin* 38a; *Ta'anit* 7a; *Numbers Rabbah* 11:1, 13:15; *Leviticus Rabbah* 12:5; *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:2, 1:19; *Tanḥuma*, *Shemini* 5; *Tanḥuma* (Buber), *Shemini* 7.

27. See *Zohar Ḥadash* 28a–b; *Tiqunei ha-Zohar*. *Tiqquna* 28 (ed. Zhitomir, 72b); Wolfson, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 319–20.

28. What the *Zohar* identifies here as "not good" wine is not entirely clear. Context, however, suggests that the text could be referring to actual, undiluted wine as opposed to the symbolic "wine" that is Torah.

29. *Zohar* 3:39a. English translation in Nathan Wolski, *A Journey into the Zohar: An Introduction to the Book of Radiance* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010), 89.

30. Wolski, *A Journey into the Zohar*, 99.

31. See for example *Zohar* 1:73a–b, 1:140b, 1:148a, 3:39a–41a. On a related note, drawing from the aforementioned rabbinic tradition, the Zoharic author identifies the deadly fruit Eve gave to Adam in the Garden of Eden with black treaded grapes. See *Zohar* 1:36a, 1:192a, 2:144a, 2:267b.

32. With reference to *Zohar* 3:39a, Wolski (*A Journey into the Zohar*, 111–12) claims that the author of this text must have been familiar with Andalusian Hebrew poetry and here comments—if not polemicizing directly—on it. While I do agree that here, as in most Zoharic passages, the author(s) use wine as a literary topos, without referring to the actual beverage, I find his claim quite hard to substantiate. In particular, I am not sure about the reason why a late thirteenth century author writing in a Christian environment would feel the urge to polemicize against customs that were celebrated—and supposedly practiced—in a very different (i.e., Muslim) environment at least two hundred years earlier.

33. See, for example, his *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:8, 3:27, 3:51, 3:54.

34. About this issue, see, for example, Moshe Idel, “*Sitre ‘Arayot* in Maimonides’ Thought,” in *Maimonides and Philosophy* (ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel; Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986), 79–91; Moshe Idel, “Maimonides and Jewish Mysticism,” in *Studies in Maimonides* (ed. I. Twersky; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 31–81; Moshe Idel, “Maimonides’ Guide of the Perplexed and the Kabbalah,” *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 197–226; Elliot Wolfson, “Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah,” in *Moses Maimonides (1138–1204)—His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical Wirkungsgeschichte in Different Cultural Contexts* (ed. G. K. Hasselhoff and O. Fraisse; Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2004), 209–37; Elliot Wolfson, “Via Negativa in Maimonides and Its Impact on Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah,” *Maimonidean Studies* 5 (2008): 363–412; Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Hartley Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution: Reimagining Judaism in Medieval Spain* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), 32–36.

35. See, for example, his *Guide of the Perplexed* 2:33 and 2:48. See also 2:8, where Maimonides specifies that one should never drink for the purpose of pleasure, but rather feel grieved when satisfying this need.

36. On this idea, see for example Daniel Matt, “The Mystic and the *Mitsvot*,” in *Jewish Spirituality* (ed. A. Green; vol. 1; New York: Crossroad, 1986), 374–76; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 252–53; Harvey Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 25–81; 275–85; Lachter, *Kabbalistic Revolution*, 32–40; 91–93; 100–104; 132–33; 159–60.

37. In 1215, the Fourth Lateran Council used the word “transubstantiated” in its profession of faith to describe the change from bread and wine to body and blood of Christ that takes place in the Eucharist. See, for example, Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). On the *Zohar*’s polemics with the Eucharist, see Ellen Haskell, *Mystical Resistance: Uncovering the Zohar’s Conversations with Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 104–5. See also Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus, “Meat-Eating and Jewish Identity; Ritualization of the Priestly Torah of Beast and Fowl (Lev 11:46) in Rabbinic Judaism and Medieval Kabbalah,” *AJS Review* 24 (1999): 227–62.

38. The most extensive work entirely devoted to Karo's life and thought is Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1977).
39. According to Werblowsky (*Joseph Karo*, 15–17), he was not accepted as a student by Isaac Luria though.
40. Joseph Karo, *Maggid Meisharim, Psalms*, ch. 19.
41. Joseph Karo, *2 Samuel*, ch. 10.
42. See especially Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, 57–65, 148–55; Lawrence Fine, *Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and His Kabbalistic Fellowship* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 71–73, 246.
43. Moses Cordovero, *Or Yaqar, Vayikra*, 17–22.
44. Moses Cordovero, *Vayikra*, 17. See also Moses Cordovero, *Terumah*, 100–101: wine consumption encourages intercourse among humans. Insofar as, according to most kabbalistic texts, human deeds in this world impact the dynamics among the *sefirot*, which populate the world above, this wine-inspired act of carnal union facilitates a similar process of unification and harmonization of the divine powers. In this sense, wine inspires coupling both below and above.
45. Moses Cordovero, *Shemini*, 166.
46. Moses Cordovero, *Terumah*, 100–101.
47. Moses Cordovero, *Shemini*, 166.
48. Moses Cordovero, *Terumah*, 100–101.
49. Moses Cordovero, *Shemini*, 166.
50. Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 163–64.
51. See Shaul Magid, *From Metaphysics to Midrash: Myth, History, and the Interpretation of Scripture in Lurianic Kabbala* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 78–81.