**The Ethical Mess of Kosher Wine (at least for Reconstructionists)**

**Texts prepared by Rabbi Josh Jacobs-Velde**

1) *Yayin nesech* (lit., “poured wine”) refers to wine which was poured in the service of idolatry. The Torah prohibits drinking or deriving any benefit (*isur hana’ah*) from such wine (Avoda Zara 29b).

*Stam yainum* refers to wine which might have been poured for an idolatrous service, but we did not see it happen. In the days of the Mishnah, there was a pagan ritual to pour off some wine from every bottle in honor of an idol. Because of the uncertainty, the rabbis decreed that wine that was produced by a *nochri* [non-Jew], or even kosher wine which was left unattended with a non-Jew, is forbidden for drinking and benefit because it may have been poured for idolatry. After the rabbinic decree was enacted we treat *stam yainum* as if we saw it being poured (Tur Y.D. 123).

Even if the non-Jew who touched the wine was a monotheist, and he would therefore certainly not serve an idol, the rabbis still forbade the wine, for another reason—because sharing wine can lead to intermarriage. However, in this case, it is only forbidden to drink the wine, but one may benefit from this wine in other ways (e.g., it may be bought and sold). (See Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 123:26f).

Once it is cooked (*mevushal*), kosher wine does not become forbidden even if touched by a non-Jew (Shulchan Aruch Y.D. 123:3).

<https://oukosher.org/halacha-yomis/yayin-nesech-stam-yainum-difference/>

2) In our day, there is no *yayin nesech* since there is no longer any idol worship. Rather, we are concerned nowadays with *stam yaynam*--ordinary wines made or handled by gentiles. The Talmud forbids such wines as a precautionary measure to prevent socializing with gentiles since it might lead to intermarriage (BT Avodah Zarah 31b) or because those who use such wines might be exposed to the religious influence of gentiles and thus be persuaded to apostatize. A hekhsher on wine, therefore, indicates that no gentiles were directly involved in any stage of the wine-making process (i.e, from the pressing of the grapes through the bottling and sealing of the wine).

Isaac Klein, *A Guide to Jewish Practice*, (Conservative Movement), p. 307

3) ...no animal products may be allowed to taint the wine. Non-kosher winemakers

often use egg whites or gelatin to clarify the wine. But kosher winemakers use bentonite, a clay material, to attract suspended particles and drag them down to the bottom of the barrel. And they never use animal bladders for filters.

Physical cleanliness, in addition to religious purity, is mandated. Tanks, crushers, presses and all equipment must be cleaned three times by modern steam cleaning, scalding hot water and when needed, blowtorches. All barrels must be brand new and/or used exclusively for kosher wines. No barrels used for non-kosher wines may be used in kosher winemaking.

(from a no longer extent webpage of kosher-wine.com, the website of Abarbanel Wine)

 4) Kosher-certified wine is needed only on Pesach, when there is concern about leavening (*chametz*). However, some Jews prefer to make kiddush over wine from Israel to indicate our connection to Eretz Yisrael.

*-A Guide to Jewish Practice Vol. 1: Everyday Living* (Reconstructionist Movement), p. 547.

5) Living in harmony with the divine presence in the world is an important goal for every Jew, whether or not one chooses to keep kosher in a traditional way. In a society in which the majority of the food on supermarket shelves is either unhealthy, unnecessary or produced by a vast corporation with little concern for sustainable living, choosing to eat in a way that acknowledges both our own bodies’ true needs and an awareness of the impact of our consumption on others is a truly holy act. Eating in this way might mean making a decision not to harm animals, to support local farmers and food producers, to spend the time and money necessary to honor our bodies, to eat in a healthy way, or not to buy food that’s wrapped in excess of packaging. The fundamental teaching and challenge of the tradition of kashrut is that what we put in our mouths and how it gets there matters. The rest, to some extent, is commentary.

*-A Guide to Jewish Practice Vol. 1: Everyday Living* (Reconstructionist Movement), p. 548. This comment is from Rabbi Toba Spitzer.