



Jewish Text Sources on Alcoholism

A Genesis 9:20

And Noah planted a vineyard... and he drank wine, became drunk and was uncovered.

B Deuteronomy 4:15

You shall carefully guard your own lives.

C *Tanhuma, Yalkut Shimoni, Noah 61*

Satan came and stood before Noah, saying, "What are you planting?" Said Noah, "A vineyard whose sweet fruits will produce wine that causes the heart to rejoice." Said Satan, "Let us be partners in this vineyard." "Yes," said Noah. Satan then brought a lamb and slaughtered it under the vine. Then he did the same—one after another—with a lion, a pig, and a monkey, sprinkling their blood throughout the vineyard, thus causing Noah to drink their blood in his wine. In so doing, Satan hinted to man that when a person begins drinking alcohol he is timid and innocent like a lamb, then when he drinks just enough he is strong like a lion, thinking that none are as strong as he. But when a person drinks too much, he acts first like a pig polluting himself in his urine, then like a monkey who dances around uttering vile words, completely out of control. All of this happened to Noah.

D *Baba Kama 15b*

Rav Nathan said: "Whence do we know that a man should not maintain a vicious dog in his home, or keep an insecure ladder in his home? Because it is said, "Thou shall not bring blood-guilt upon your house."

E *Pesahim 113a*

Rav said to his son Hiyya: "Do not take drugs."

F *Rashbam to Pesahim 113a*

Do not take drugs: this is because they demand periodic doses. And your heart will crave them. You will waste much money thereby. Even for medical cure do not take them, and, if possible, find another mode of healing.

G *Rambam, Hilkhhot Rotzeiah 11:4-5*

Whether it is the roof or anything else that is dangerous, so that a person may potentially stumble and lose his life, such as, for example, if he had a well or ditch in his courtyard, whether they contained water or not, he is obligated to make a protective barrier of ten handbreadths or to make a cover, so that no one will fall and be fatally injured. Likewise, concerning any obstruction that is life-threatening, there is a positive commandment to remove it and protect against it and to be exceedingly careful concerning it, as it states, "But take utmost care and guard yourselves scrupulously." And if he does not remove the (danger), and allows the dangerous obstacles to remain in place, he has nullified the positive commandment and has violated (the negative commandment) of "You shall not bring blood-guilt on your house." There are many things that the Sages prohibited because they involve danger to life, and anyone who violates them saying, "I have the right to endanger myself, what business is it of others?" or who says, "I am not concerned about the risk," receives *makat mardut* (rabbinically sanctioned lashes).

H Rambam, *Hilkhot Yom Tov* 6:20

When a person eats, drinks, and rejoices on *Yom Tov*, he should not be drawn by alcohol and levity and frivolity to say that whoever does more of this fulfills the *mitzvah* of *simhah* (rejoicing) in a better manner. For drunkenness, laughter and frivolity are not *simhah* but folly and frivolity, about which we were not commanded. *Simhah* is when we serve the Creator of all... and it is impossible to serve God through jesting and levity and drunkenness.

I Shulhan Arukh, *Yoreh De'ah* 116:5

One should take care never to put money in one's mouth, lest it be covered with the dried spittle of a diseased person...One should not leave a knife inserted into an *etrog* or a vegetable, lest a man unknowingly fall on its points and be killed.

J Rema, *Yoreh De'ah* 116:5

One should avoid all things that might lead to danger, because danger to life is more severe than a ritual prohibition, and one should be more concerned about a possible danger to life than a possible prohibition. Therefore, the Sages prohibited one to walk in a place of danger, such as near a leaning wall, or alone at night... All these things are intended to avoid danger, and one who is concerned with his health will avoid them. And it is prohibited to rely on some saving miracle or to endanger oneself in any similar situation.

K Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, *Iggerot Moshe, Yoreh De'ah* 3:35 (written in 1973)

Regarding the matter that a number of boys from the yeshiva have begun smoking marijuana, it is clear that this is a forbidden act based upon a number of essential laws of the Torah. First, as this act harms and causes deterioration of the body, and even if there are some healthy individuals who are not excessively harmed by it, it still harms the mind and they are not fully able to comprehend an idea [when they are under its influence], which is even more serious. They are then preventing themselves from studying Torah properly as well as preventing themselves from prayer and the fulfillment of *mitzvot*. Performance of these acts without mental faculties is as if they have not been performed at all.

Moreover [smoking marijuana] causes a great craving, even greater than that for food and such, which are [at least] necessary for man's sustenance. And there are those who cannot control and sublimate their craving [addiction], and this is the great prohibition which is stated in relation to the "rebellious son" who has an enormous desire for food, though it is for kosher food, and even more so it is forbidden to bring oneself to a [situation] of a greater craving, especially for a substance which is totally unnecessary for man's sustenance...

In addition, the reason given for [punishing] the rebellious son—that he will eventually come to rob and steal from others [to sustain his habit] (*Sanhedrin* 68b)—applies here as well. Moreover, the parents of such children [who use drugs] are very distressed and upset about the situation and thus [these children] are violating the commandment of honoring one's parents. In addition, there exists the prohibition devolving from the positive commandment of "You shall be holy" as interpreted by Ramban in his commentary to the Torah [Lev. 19]. Moreover, they cause the violation of many other prohibitions, besides the ones [enumerated above].

"What is considered perfect repentance? When a person is confronted with the same set of circumstances that existed when he sinned in the past, and he has the opportunity to repeat the sin, but this time he resists because of his desire to repent. (Maimonides, *Hilkhot Teshuvah* 2:1)"

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