

BIBLE TIPPLE

DAVID WEITZMAN SITS DOWN WITH A GLASS AND

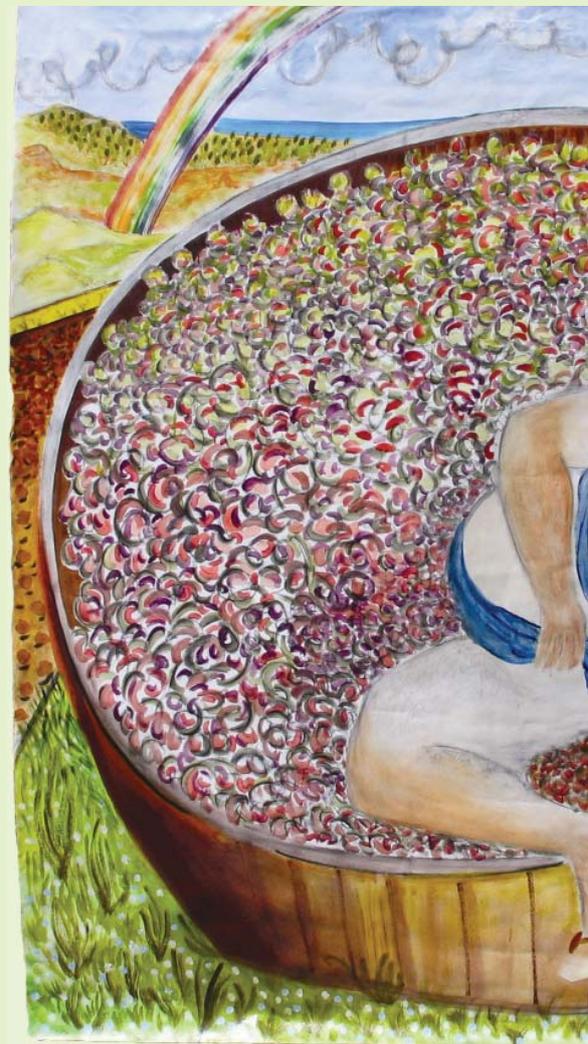
Wine-making is an ancient art, going back perhaps 10,000 years, but we'll never know who first hit on the idea. As far as the Bible is concerned, the origins of wine-making are left undefined, but wine figures throughout. Sometimes, it's the villain; at other times, a blessing.

First up is the story of Noah. Poor man. Genesis recounts how, to his neighbours' derision, he tackles ark building to a precise specification, followed by nearly ten months shut up in this floating menagerie with his family and twinned samples of every known (or accessible) form of animal life, or at least as many as he could catch and persuade to share his crowded cruise ship for the unknown voyage. Back on dry land, is it any wonder the poor fellow felt he needed a break and what better than planting a vineyard and looking forward to a rich harvest and some good drinking.

Genesis describes his vineyard planting in a very matter-of-fact way, with no hint of its being pioneering horticulture. Yet, for all his labours, poor Noah receives harsh treatment from the great medieval commentator, Rashi, who criticises him for deliberately profaning himself. "He should have occupied himself first with planting something different." This is a bit rich, coming from Rashi, who is believed to have earned his living from vineyards or the sale of wine.

Other commentators take the kindlier view that, as Noah was the first man to cultivate the vine, his ignorance of the intoxicating outcome may be excused. Of course, the question arises: 'Where did Noah get his vine cuttings?' The *Midrash*, to the rescue, suggests that he had taken them with him into the ark, which would indicate that he was already well aware of viniculture and vinification.

Anyway, whether or not Noah knew the potential effects of 'el vino' (*hayayin*) we shall never discover. All that Genesis tells us is that he drank himself silly and exposed himself in some embarrassing or shameful, but undefined, way. One son, Ham, appears to have mocked his Dad – perhaps even committing some unrevealed mischief – while two others, Shem and Japheth, discreetly covered him up. Waking from his stupor, Noah surprisingly seems to know what Ham has



been up to, and instantly curses him. So much for getting drunk. And so much for sons!

Next, it's the turn of daughters. Still in Genesis, we read that Abraham's nephew, Lot, has two of them – all that remained of his family after the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and his wife's transformation into a pillar of salt. For reasons obscure, the two daughters get the idea that there are no men alive to sire their children – only their own father. So they cook up a plot, leave their cave dwelling and nip into the nearest wine store to stock up. One would imagine that they would encounter a man or two during this shopping trip, but they appear to have been hell bent on getting Dad drunk and sleeping with him.

READS THE HOLY BOOK



They even agreed to do it by age – the elder on the first night and the younger the following night – and they both got pregnant. At least, this second example of wine-induced intoxication proved productive.

These two instances of what wine can do might have been expected to lead to a prohibition against drinking the dangerous stuff (and the Bible is certainly not short on prohibitions) but wine is about to become very respectable. It does so when Jacob passes himself off as Esau, brings Isaac a venison stew, and gives him wine to wash it down. In return, Isaac blesses ‘Esau’ with “May God give thee...plenty of corn and wine...”

Interestingly, the Hebrew word for ‘wine’ in this blessing is *tirosh*, which means ‘new wine’ or the unfermented first pressing of the grapes. This is the word the Bible uses when it refers to wine as a harvested commodity, whereas *yayin* is the fully fermented, alcoholic tittle.

In the later Books – Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers – wine is an entirely respectable ‘drink offering’, though the priests are cautioned: “Drink no wine nor strong drink when ye go into the tent of meeting, that ye die not.” At least, they could quaff at other times. But becoming a Nazirite was worse; it meant *total* abstinence – even from grape juice and grapes themselves. The barren mother of Samson was instructed by an angel not to drink any wine even before she became pregnant, so that Samson would be able to be a Nazirite from the moment of conception.

Another would-be mother who was barren was Hannah. Spotted by the priest Eli, with moving lips but silent voice, he accused her of being drunk. “Put away thy wine from thee.” But poor Hannah assured him “I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have poured out my soul before the Lord.” Hannah was rewarded by giving birth to the prophet Samuel.

Deuteronomy, Chapter 11, contains the second paragraph of the *Shema* prayer. “If ye shall hearken diligently unto My commandments...I will give the rain of your land in its season...that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine and thine oil.” But punishment is to be the reward for failing to keep the commandments. “Thou shalt plant vineyards and dress them, but thou shalt neither drink of the wine, nor gather the grapes; for the worm shall eat them.”

Wine plays a prominent part in the Esther story. King Ahasuerus threw an over-the-top (it lasted 180 days!) party for everyone who was anyone in his kingdom. To round it off, he laid on a further seven-day feast for all the people in Shushan. The wine flowed “in abundance” – not some cheap plonk, but “royal wine”. Mercifully, no one was compelled to drink, but everyone was encouraged to drink according to his wishes. Not to be outdone, Queen Vashti held her own hen party. But when “the heart

of the king was merry with wine”, Vashti was summoned to appear at the king’s feast and show off her beauty. We’ll never know just why she refused. Quite possibly, appearing before a drunken male audience was not an appealing prospect, and perhaps she, herself, was a little tipsy. But her refusal led to her removal and subsequent replacement by Esther. Esther’s ploy for dealing with Haman also involved ‘wine parties’, and it was at the second of these that she denounced him to the king.

Psalms 194 (*Borchi nafshi*, recited on Rosh Chodesh and winter Shabbat afternoons) declares the many achievements of the Almighty, including the production of “wine that maketh glad the heart of man”. But Proverbs takes a dimmer view: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink is riotous, and whosoever reeleth thereby is not wise”,

The Bible unashamedly explores the whole gamut of wine’s uses and effects – from the perverse to the sublime

“He that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich”, and “It is not for kings to drink wine”.

Solomon’s Song of Songs sets wine within an erotic setting. “Thy love is better than wine”, “Thy navel is like a round goblet, wherein no mingled wine is wanting”, “Let thy breasts be as clusters of the vine...and the roof of thy mouth like the best wine”. You get the general idea.

The Bible unashamedly explores the whole gamut of wine’s uses and effects – from the perverse to the sublime. Bear them in mind next time you make Kiddush or when you’re on your fourth *Seder* glass. L’chaim!

Illustration: Jonathon Brown, *Noah, drunk*, Oil and graphite on canvas, 2005
Hanging scroll, 210 x 216 cms

In the stubbly vines (top right) is hidden the Hebrew text of Noah’s drunkenness, Genesis IX, xx and xxi.
www.villaparasol.com

HOW WINEMAKERS BECAME MONEY-LENDERS

HAYM SOLOVEITCHIK argues that the ban on Jews drinking wine touched by Gentiles led indirectly to a huge Jewish investment in viticulture in northern Europe in the Middle Ages and to the Jews' subsequent major role as money-lenders

Gold, Goldberg, Goldstein; Silber, Silberman, Silberstein – common Jewish names. Understandable enough, as historically Jews were involved in moneylending. But Wein, Weiner, Weinstein, Weinberg, Weinreich – what did Jews have to do with wine?

Jews in the early Middle Ages are traders; in the latter Middle Ages moneylenders. Where did they get all that money to lend?

Finally, in the late 14th and throughout the 15th century, at a time when Jews are demonised and persecuted as never before, they are found deeply involved in financing viticulture. This is strange, as this was a prestigious profession; why weren't they expelled from viticultural credit the way they had been from most other forms of commercial credit and consigned to the lowliest of them all – consumer credit, that is to say, pawnbroking? Is this large-scale involvement some strange efflorescence of the late Middle Ages or simply the first documentation that we possess of a long-standing activity?

In what is arguably the first anti-Jewish tract of the Middle Ages written in the 820s, Agobard's *On Jewish Insolence*, the author complains that Jews sell to Christians wine that they consider 'defiled' (*immundus*) and will not themselves drink. He further informs us that Jews provide wine to high royal officials and boast of their access to the corridors of power. His successor Amulo writes that Jewish wine is drunk everywhere, and some clerics even use it for the Mass. The first sizeable record of Jewish landholding comes from the Mâconnais in the early 10th century and there 65% of Jewish landholding is of vineyards, while the general ratio in Burgundy of vineyard to

arable land was some 25%.

Jewish law forbids drinking wine touched by Gentiles. Consequently, Jews had to produce their own wine – no small task considering the enormous quantities of wine that were consumed during the Middle Ages. When Jews first moved into any new location, they had to assure for themselves not only a steady supply of kosher meat but also of kosher wine. In the Mediterranean lands, this was purely a question of manpower – as the grape is a sub-tropical fruit and grows there naturally. In northern Europe, however, viticulture is a constant struggle against the natural environment. Wine can only be grown in select places and must be constantly tended by people skilled in its cultivation. Vineyards seem so natural a part of the Champagne landscape that we forget that vines are as natural to the Champagne as palm trees.

Jews in the 8th and 9th centuries, or at least the Jews we know of, were traders, often of luxury items. They swiftly realised that the skill they had of necessity acquired in viticulture and their long contacts with vintners could be put to very lucrative use and, as one way to a ruler's heart is through his stomach, purveying quality wine could also give them the access to power – so crucial for their physical safety.

Throughout the Middle Ages wine remained a staple of north European commerce. Few places here were better suited to or had longer traditions of viticulture than the Rhineland, and none had a better waterway to the wine-starved countries bordering the North Sea. Once wine became a major, if not the major item of trade, Jewish merchants in the Rhineland were in danger of being marginalised and of being reduced to peddlers as until now they



had produced and traded in kosher wine only and it soon became impossible to supply enough of this for the swiftly growing general market. If they were to maintain their position in trade they had to start selling non-Jewish wine as well – but how were they to do this if the rabbinic ban on trade in Gentile wine remained in place?

Just about this time, in the mid-10th century, we hear of a compromise position being reluctantly adopted by rabbis in Lotharingia. Gentile wine as payment would be tolerated; initiating trade – under no circumstances. Given this ban, the only way Jews could maintain their position in the trade of the most profitable commodity in the Rhineland was to offer credit to the non-Jewish vineyard owners for viticultural expansion and stipulate that payment be made in wine. Only thus could they be assured of a steady supply, a *sine qua non* of trade.

By the year 1000 Jews were playing a significant role in viticultural investment and there was scarcely a riskier or more long-term investment in the Middle Ages or a more labour-intensive and capital-intensive one. Vines in the temperate zone require year-round, skilled toil to raise a crop in an environment hostile to its growth. It takes anywhere from three to seven years to develop a new vineyard, and some three years of maturation are needed for simply expanding an existing one by layering (*marcottage*). The most one can hope for is one good crop every three years or so. We are talking of three to five, realistically even five to seven expense-laden years of waiting for a return on an investment. Throughout this protracted span of time there are numerous crises and need for constant supervision. Indeed, research has found that

the vineyards in 10th-century Burgundy were all within 15 kilometres of Jewish settlement, and the same was true in Vesoul in the 14th century.

The investor was constantly confronted with the question whether to sink in further money to save or improve the harvest or to cut his losses. Equally necessary was the ability to estimate what the crop – if successful – would be worth at harvest time. This in turn demanded a network of information on the conditions in neighbouring areas, as these determined the overall supply at the time of sale. Added to all the above, there was a final prerequisite: the money manager's sense of whether a further outlay – even if successful – was the optimal use of capital at that moment.

This combination of viticultural expert, merchant and money manager, coupled with a network of information provided by co-religionists, was, I suggest, more frequently found among Jews as a group than among Christians. Jews would thus extend credit to non-Jews who would rely on Jewish money and expertise in producing wine, and pay the

loan back in wine which the Jewish investor could then sell.

If so, we understand why Jews continue to play an important role in viticultural credit in the late Middle Ages, even after they have been long exiled from society and from all its untainted professions. The sums at risk in viticultural credit were simply too large, the prospective profits too great and Jewish expertise too long and well established for their persecutors to forgo.

If this be correct, we have then uncovered a Jewish profession – the viticultural expert and investor – of some half a millennium that has hitherto gone unnoted. In addition, we have brought to light a significant Jewish contribution to German medieval agriculture, which too had slipped into the abyss, the oblivion of time.

Finally, we witness anew the one law that does obtain in history – 'the law of unintended consequence'. For the origins of both the centuries-old profession and the possible agricultural contribution lay in a religious injunction enacted some thousand years earlier in the pagan Mediterranean that

worked its unanticipated effects in Central Europe in the high Middle Ages. And the injunction's impact may not have stopped there. When Jews began to be pushed out of trade, they naturally gravitated towards its flip side – credit. Moneylending, once wholly ancillary to their commercial activities, gradually became the dominant mode of Jewish enterprise. Thus the credit originally extended to viticulture may well have paved the way in Germany for the eventual Jewish concentration in moneylending, a profession that shaped in no small measure the fate of the Jews in the coming centuries and their image for close to another millennium. The talmudic ban on Gentile wine and the potent taboo attending it thus played, in a wholly unforeseen way, a truly remarkable role in the history of the Jews in Christian Europe.

This is the abridged version of an essay to appear in *On the History of Halacha*, a collection of Haym Soloveitchik's writing to be published by the Littman Library.

Why only Orthodox Jews? AGI ERDOS

Kosher wine is produced in exactly the same way as any regular wine, with the stipulation that it may only be handled by observant Jews and that it must not have come into contact with any additives of a non-kosher origin (such as gelatine or blood that is sometimes used in the filtering process).

The so-called *mevushal* (boiled) wine has undergone flash pasteurization at a temperature of 70 C. According to rabbinic opinion, this heat treatment changes the status of the wine and makes it 'immune' to non-Jewish touch. The advantage is that such wine can be handled by non-Jewish or non-observant people (for example, waiters at functions) without rendering it unsuitable for Jewish consumption. Most affordable kosher wines today are *mevushal*; some experts, however, claim that pasteurization has a detrimental effect on the quality of the wine and people who are very particular about their wine will insist on buying only non-*mevushal* brands. The label on kosher wine bottles will always inform buyers whether the wine is *mevushal* or not.

Apart from the commonsense ruling that for wine to be kosher all its ingredients need to be kosher, there is the less self-evident law that it may not be touched by non-Jews. What is the background of this ruling? What's wrong with non-Jewish wine

if it doesn't contain anything *treif*?

The answer is rooted in Judaism's uncompromising rejection of idolatry. In ancient times the Jews were surrounded by pagan societies whose religious practices were considered idol worship. The sources tell us that these practices included libations – the making of drink offerings to idols. Whereas the Bible condemns idolatry and libations, it doesn't explicitly ban the consumption of non-Jewish wine. However, by the time of the Mishna and Talmud (2nd-6th centuries CE) the wine of non-Jews (all of whom were considered idolaters) had become a major issue. Rabbis spent considerable time and effort detailing and discussing the ban not only on consuming such wine but also on deriving any benefit

from it (eg trade). Any wine that was as much as touched by a non-Jew was considered *yein neseikh* (libation wine), meaning that it could have been used for idolatrous purposes.

The medieval rabbis seemed to have difficulty applying the harsh rules relating to idolaters to their own society. The average Christian or Muslim was not generally seen as an idol worshipper any more, so could their wine be allowed? Interestingly enough, instead of relying on this argument and lifting the ban, Ashkenazi rabbis held on to the prohibition and found another reason for it: the danger of social mingling which might lead to mixed marriages. This potential danger is only mentioned in one place in the Talmud, which is otherwise exclusively concerned with the problem of idolatrous libations. The medieval rabbis, however, put this single reference to good use and conveniently relegated the question of idolatry to the background.

Their ban has not lost its validity to this day and halakha forbids the consumption of wine produced, or even touched by, non-Jews as well as non-observant Jews, unless it is *mevushal*.

Natan Cna'ani can carry the grapes at the Tulip Winery but he cannot touch the juice.





Gallil Mountain's northernmost vineyard, Misgav Am. Photo by Rina Nagila (rinanagila.com)

ISRAEL'S WINES COME OF AGE

AGI ERDOS

Kiddush? Palwin? Number 10 or number 4? For Jews, at least in the English-speaking world, the syrupy sacramental excuse-for-wine was for generations the only association with kosher or Israeli wine. But no longer. Although still produced, sweet kiddush wine has been sidelined in Israel by an increasing number of good quality table wines as well as serious high-end wines (not all of them kosher), produced by both old and new wineries.

During the centuries of Muslim rule, wine production was prohibited as part of the strict Muslim laws against the consumption of alcohol. This led to the disappearance of the ancient vineyards and indigenous grape varieties in the land of Israel. Today mainly French grapes (Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Chardonnay and Sauvignon Blanc) and other international varieties are grown. Many of these were introduced in the late 19th century by Baron Edmond James de Rothschild, who also sent French wine experts to Palestine to support new immigrants in making a living. The first vineyards were planted near Zikhron Yaakov and Rishon-le-Zion. These vineyards are today owned by Carmel, the largest wine producer in Israel.

Even though Baron Rothschild sowed the seeds of the modern Israeli wine industry over 100 years ago, it was not until the 1980s that winemaking really took off in the country. The last 30 years have seen an explosion both in the amount and quality of wine produced, as well as in the number of wineries. All this thanks to a new generation of adventurous young winemakers, many of whom come from Australia or the US and have learnt the trade at prestigious universities and wineries abroad. They combine American production technology and local high-tech agricultural methods, such as Israeli-invented drip irrigation.

Wine production in Israel takes place in five regions: Galilee (including the Golan Heights), the Judean Hills (the areas surrounding Jerusalem), Samson (between the Judean Hills and the Coastal Plain), Sharon (the coastal plains just south of Haifa, including areas around Zikhron Yaakov and Binyamina) and, surprisingly, the Negev desert.

Since 2008 the Israeli wine industry has produced around 30 million bottles annually. The majority of production is still in the hands of large companies, but the number of small, boutique-type wineries is constantly growing.

AGI ERDOS sees how small can be beautiful in Israel's burgeoning wine industry

CASTEL - A FAMILY AFFAIR

When I meet Eli Ben Zaken, owner of the Castel Winery in the Judean Hills, at a wine-tasting in London, my first impression is that he's a real Renaissance man. With his brown checkered jacket and longish hair he stands out as different among the other successful winemakers. I am blown away by his Blanc du Castel and we start chatting about the wondrous world of oaked whites. Then listening to his life story only confirms my suspicion that he is not your typical businessman. Born in Egypt to an Egyptian father and Italian mother and educated in England, Italy and Switzerland, Eli is fluent in four languages and is as international as it gets. But he is also a Jew whose national identity was shaped first by an 'amateur Zionist' father, then by following the Six Day War from Geneva and people's responses to the events as they unfolded.

He first arrived in Israel as a volunteer and when his three months were over he knew he was coming back. "Perhaps under the influence of the 1968 student revolts, in my generation we were asking ourselves questions about the meaning of life and whether it was all about money-making. When I and my wife settled in Israel, I decided I wanted a house and went into chicken farming." While this was rewarding in many ways there was no money in it, so the family started a restaurant in Jerusalem. It was only a few steps from good food to good wine: in the 1980s Eli taught himself winemaking from books and from talking to other winemakers.

When I ask him how someone who learned the trade from books can produce award-winning wines, he replies, "It's not that difficult. You have to be very careful and meticulous. Cleanliness and attention to detail are crucial. If all that comes together, you'll make good wine."

Their wines weren't certified kosher to begin with. "I had this naïve idea that secular Jews the world over would be happy to drink Israeli wines with or without the kosher label. I was wrong. Secular Jews were not the least interested in Israeli wine." Since their exports were not doing well, and since export sales are important for a winery's reputation and prices, in 2003 they decided to go kosher.

Eli started out in the winemaking business on his own while the rest of the family took care of the restaurant. Today, however, all of his children are involved in Castel. I ask him what it's like to work together as a family. "It's great but not easy. You can read more about it in Freud," he laughs. "But what's rewarding is knowing that it's going to be difficult and still being able to do it."

Being a small boutique winery, how do they survive the competition from the large producers? "We survive because we're small and only focus on three products. Winemaking for me is not an industrial business. We do home-crafted products and cater for those who like quality." They certainly seem to have found their niche in the market as critics rate them highly, their wines are going at good prices (£30-45) and every kosher wine snob today knows their brand.



Before we say goodbye, I ask Eli whether he plans to stay in the business or wants to try something new. "I'm not so young any more... Also, winemaking is very very rewarding.

"It's not like an exam that you pass and that's it. Here you build up to something with your decisions and you can't change it. Every time you get ready for harvest, it's a new time in your life; you always learn and do something differently."

TULIP – WINE THAT LOVES PEOPLE

The Itzhaki family used to be in the construction business but wanted to create something themselves. In 2003 they decided to take over an abandoned winery in Kfar Tikvah (Village of Hope), down the road from their home in Kiryat Tivon, near Haifa. Kfar Tikvah is a residential community in which 200 people with mental disabilities are encouraged to realise their potential. Work is done in the morning, and the afternoons are for education and other activities. The community was started 50 years ago when this sort of approach was still pioneering.

The Itzhakis decided that the residents should be a part of the small staff at Tulip Winery. "You can't have a business in Kfar

Tikvah and not be part of the village. It seemed self-evident that residents should also be employed, and to us they are workers just like any other workers," Tulip winemaker Tamir Arzy told us. Currently four out of their nine staff members are employed in this way. Nathan, Dedi, Eli and Inbal derive great satisfaction from their work and enjoy being part of the winemaking process. The family and staff are also pleased to see how the Kfar Tikvah community members tackle tasks and feel at home in the winery. "If we have an event on in the evening, there's no way they'd miss it! They really love the winery, partly because it's such a different environment to the village."

When Tulip recently decided to become kosher, they faced a lot of difficulties as they insisted on keeping their four Kfar Tikvah workers. "The main thing about kosher is that the person who makes the wine has to be a religious Jew and he alone can touch the wine until the bottles are sealed. Even I can't touch it because I'm not observant." They had postponed the whole process of becoming kosher because they couldn't agree with the rabbinic authorities about how their staff could continue to participate in the work. "Finally we came to an agreement with one of the organisations and worked out which parts of the winemaking process they couldn't do. Working in the winery, cleaning and packaging, all these jobs they can still do. But we had to teach them to walk around with their hands behind their backs because we have to make sure they don't touch a tank or something by accident. But finally it all worked out well."

At Tulip they don't grow their own grapes. Rather, they select grapes from the finest vineyards in the Upper Galilee and the Judean Hills. They have a long-term contract with the growers and combine the grapes to create something new. Their motto is top quality wine, made with love.

Their winemaker, Tamir Arzy, first trained as a chef and since his father is a grower of wine grapes, he decided to study viticulture at The Hebrew University. "My plan was to learn winemaking in Australia, the United States or Bordeaux, but then I started working at Tulip as a winemaker and I never looked back." Itzhak and Leah Itzhaki, as well as their son Roy, are also involved in every aspect of running the business. "Before becoming kosher, we were all workers. Even the manager would put on his work clothes and during the harvest we were all out there. The Itzhakis are also here at the weekends, welcoming visitors, because it makes a great impression when people can actually meet the owners."

The Tulip Winery currently produces 100,000 bottles a year, which are sold throughout Israel and around the world.

Itzhak Itzhaki with Inbal and Natan



WINE ROUTES IN ISRAEL

Today a number of wineries in Israel offer guided tours and tastings (including Passover tours) and a welcome at their visitor centres and restaurants. Make a tour of it and travel from vineyard to vineyard within a region. Do book in advance!

MOUNT CARMEL ROUTE

Amphorae (Makura farm, Kerem Maharal): Pretty boutique winery located between Zikhron Yaakov and Haifa. Tastings and visits to the nearby olive oil press on the farm. Tel: +972 (0)4 9840702 www.amphorae-v.com (non-kosher)

Binyamina: one of the largest vineyards in Israel. Journey into the winery, its past and present winemaking processes, to the state-of-the-art barrel cellar and a taste of wines and liqueurs. A kosher restaurant offers dairy breakfast and meat lunches and dinners. The visitors' centre is in a building originally founded in 1925 by Baron Rothschild as a perfume factory. Tel: +972 (0)4 6388643/2 or visitorcenter@binyaminawines.com www.binyaminawines.com

Carmel (Zikhron Yaakov): the largest and oldest winery in Israel. The visitor centre, Carmel Wine & Culture, offers workshops



and tutored tastings as well as tours. The shop contains a selection of bin-end wines and magnums unavailable elsewhere.

Tel: +972 (0)4 6391788 or wineculture@carmelwines.co.il

Tishbi lies between Zikhron Yaakov and Binyamina. The visitor centre provides tours, tastings and a selection of foods, wines and olive oils. There is an alembic

still for distilling brandy, purchased from the Cognac region of France. In the wine store there is a 'filling tank' for visitors to fill their own containers with wine.

Tel: +972 (0)4 628 8195 www.tishbi.com
Tulip (Kfar Tikvah, Kiryat Tivon): Their visitor centre provides an opportunity to taste wines in a particularly homey atmosphere. Tel: +972 (0)4 983 0573 www.tulip-winery.co.il

JUDEAN HILLS ROUTE

Most of these wineries are small and do not have visitor centres so booking in advance is important.

Domaine du Castel (Ramat Raziel): Small and family-run, Castel has been called Israel's most picturesque winery – and their wine is not bad either. www.castel.co.il Tel: +972 2 534 2249 castel@castel.co.il

Clos de Gat (Kibbutz Harel, Ayalon Valley): The 'gat' – an old wine press situated in the vineyards – dates from the pre-Roman period. Their wine is not filtered, which is unusual today, and not kosher. www.closdegat.com Tel: +972 2 999 3505

Ella Valley: A brand new, ambitious commercial winery. The visitor centre is

said to be nice, but most interesting here will be a tour of the vineyards – we hear they are immaculate. www.ellavalley.com Tel: +972 2 999 4885

A unique, though non-kosher, experience in this region is to visit the three Christian monastic wineries: **Domaine de Latroun** is owned by Trappist monks; the **Mony** winery is part of the Dir Rafat monastery; and **Cremisan** is run by a Salesian monastery at Beit Jamal.

TOURS

Israel Wine Experience offer tours, tastings and lectures by wine professionals. Tel: +972 2 990 8422 Israel.wine.exp@gmail.com

Israel Wine Tour offers customised tours for individuals and groups. www.wines-israel.co.il

My Israel Wine Tours organise winetasting events and Passover wine tours. www.myisraelwinetours.com

Culinary Tours of the Galilee offer culinary as well as wine tours. www.galileecuisine.co.il

www.wines-israel.co.il website is a great resource for learning about Israeli wineries, wine routes, history and other wine-related topics.

WHICH ISRAELI WINE? DAN WHINE picks four of the best (all are kosher)

WHITES

Yarden, Odem Single Vineyard, Organic Chardonnay 2008
13.5% ABV, £13.15 - £17

The Odem vineyards owned by the mighty Golan Heights Winery have been farmed organically since 1998 and are located 1200m above sea level in the Northern Golan. This truly is one of the best whites Israel has to offer at the moment and a testament to the enormous strides the industry has taken. Fermented and aged in French oak, this chardonnay has a deep golden, almost bronze appearance. The nose is packed full of tropical fruits and caramel leading to a beautifully harmonious marriage of gentle vanilla oak, minerality, pears, blossom, lively acidity and a creamy, buttery long finish. Available from: www.justisraeliwine.co.uk

Dalton Reserve, Viognier, 2007
13.5% ABV, £14.50 - £19

Located in the Upper Galilee, Dalton is fast becoming a top contender in the market of mid-priced Israeli wines. This deliciously complex Viognier has been partly fermented with wild yeasts and aged in new French oak. A slightly spicy, floral aroma leads into a velvety, deep and rich wine with caramelised apple, fig and apricot on the palate and a mouth-wateringly long finish. Available from: www.thegrapevineuk.com

REDS

Galil Mountain, Merlot 2005
14.5% ABV, £11.79 - £12.50

Created in 2000 under a partnership between Kibbutz Yiron and Golan Heights Winery, the state-of-the-art winery and vineyards of Galil Mountain are found 1000m

above sea level in the Upper Galilee. Aged in stainless steel tanks for six months, this wine has a deep ruby garnet appearance. A surprisingly fresh and fruity nose is packed full of blackcurrant with a hint of strawberry and the palate is a complex mix of red fruits and chocolate.

Available from: www.thegrapevineuk.com

Carmel Winery, Kayoumi Single Vineyard, Shiraz 2006
13.5% ABV, £29.50 - £32.50

If you're going to buy one Israeli wine this year then this should be it. Recently winning the international trophy for Red Rhone Varietal at the *Decanter Magazine* awards, this is an enormous and complex wine, hand-picked in the upper Galilee and delicately aged in French oak for 15 months. Deep garnet in appearance with flickers of

purple and green, this wine is fantastically hibiscus on the nose, with generous helpings of black cherry. The palate is an explosion of cherry and plum, with a hint of rosemary and a long finish.

Available from: www.thesampler.co.uk

Dan Whine is currently studying for a BSc in Viticulture and Oenology. He is Manager of Sommelier of Plateau, Brighton

