

Third Cup of Wine: A Focus on Punishment Rather than Rehabilitation

Contributed by [Eli Allen](#)

Source: Baltimore Social Justice Seder

Leader:

With the third cup of wine we remember God's promise to redeem the Israelites with an outstretched arm. With this cup we turn our thoughts to those not being offered a helping hand. Scant resources are allocated within the criminal justice system to provide alternatives to incarceration and prepare incarcerated individuals for successfully reentering society.

The criminal justice system has become the primary strategy by which we address many of the challenges facing members of low income and minority communities, including drug addiction, mental illness, behavioral issues at schools, and limited access to employment. However, we have designed the criminal justice system as a maze that is easy to enter and difficult to leave.

Many of these individuals enter the criminal justice system after committing a non-violent drug offense, and then are put on a path that goes straight to prison and does not address the issues that cause people to cycle in and out of the corrections system.

Two-fifths of drug offenders are rearrested for the same charge. This speaks to the physiological nature of drug addiction and the need to address it as a medical condition requiring treatment, rather than a crime requiring incarceration. We need to redesign our criminal justice system so that non-violent drug offenders are diverted to alternative treatment programs that address drug addiction, mental illness, and job access. Across the entire prison population, the vast majority of people will return to society, but will leave prison severely ill prepared to do so. Reflecting a lack of in-prison treatment services and the level of societal exclusion, studies have shown that incarceration actually increases the risk of reoffending. xxvi In part due to the limited availability of funding, 60% of Maryland prisoners do not participate in treatment and educational programming each year. Our criminal justice system warehouses people in prison, punishes them, and then returns them to our society worse off than when they left.

Recite together:

Baruch ata adonai, eloheinu melech ha'olam, borei pri hagafen.

ברוך אתה יי אלוקינו מלך העולם בורא פרי הגפן

(Drink the third cup. Refill immediately.)