

## ALCOHOL AND TRAFFIC SAFETY

Believers of three world religions, Christians, Jews, and Moslems, live in Israel. Islam prohibits the drinking of alcohol, but Jewry and Christianity permit it.

The male Jew tastes wine for the first time on the eighth day of life, when traditionally a wine-soaked sucker is put in his mouth to assuage the pain of circumcision, and, afterwards, on the occasion of each religious feast, or other festivities, when he says the ritual blessing over a cup of wine. In spite of these rather frequent opportunities, the Jews, both inside and outside Israel, drink wine or other alcoholic beverages only in insignificant quantities, and the overwhelming majority is satisfied with a sip of wine in fulfilling the ritual requirements (Table I.).

In court, I have often heard young physicians who had not studied in Europe or America testify that their knowledge of the symptoms of drunkenness came not from their clinical experience, but from text books.

Thus, the percentage of traffic offenders who are under the influence of alcohol is very low (Tables II and III).

But this comforting result of the abstinence of the Israelis from intoxicating drinks does not at all improve the road safety. The rate of road accidents tends rather to the higher level of incidences, than to the lower (Table IV.).

So much for statistics. But what is the significance of these figures? We can understand the low alcohol consumption of the Moslems, who observe their religious prohibition, but we have no clear-cut reasons why the average Jew whose religion explicitly permits the drinking of wine, does not indulge in it. In this respect, the Jew in Israel is like his brothers elsewhere in the world. Therefore the particular psychological problems of the Israeli youth cannot explain this.

It is often argued that the Jew detests intoxication, and that the society considers drunkenness as a degradation of the human being. These moral attitudes perhaps prevent

even moderate drinking in society. Even the small quantity of alcohol which the social drinker takes, is more than the law permits to the driver of a car. Nevertheless, the curve for road accidents is steadily rising. We do not know exactly what proportion of traffic accidents in Europe or America is caused by alcohol, and the statistics shown above are of no help. The estimations vary between 10% and 25%, and higher, i.e. in 3/4 or more cases, alcohol does not account for the accident. The same more or less obscure forces influencing the behaviour of the driver are acting in the Israeli driver - not considering in this context, mechanical factors and conditions of road and weather.

As the rate of traffic accidents "not under the influence of drink" is especially high in Israel, we may assume that the Israeli driver has less internal restraints and intrinsic brakes, and does not require alcohol for releasing them. In parentheses, I consider our law which punishes drivers under the influence of alcohol justified, in spite of the low incidence of drunken driving.

The purpose of this paper, with its meagre, almost negative results concerning the problem of alcohol and road safety is to round out the ample experience of other countries. We have to be cautious not to be entangled in an over-estimation of the role of alcohol in traffic accidents, and have to be aware that alcohol is one of several factors, and sometimes not at all needed by the driver to press down the accelerator, or turn the steering wheel carelessly. Although alcohol is an important, and easily and accurately testable factor for clarifying the releasing process from internal stress and constraints, we have to keep in mind that there are other factors, by no means less dangerous.

The framework of this problem is very well known to you all, and I intended to underline it by the concrete example of Israel.

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TABLE I.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Arrested For Drunkenness</u>	<u>Per 10,000 Population (Aged Over 15)</u>
England & Wales	1966	70,499	19
Israel	1961/63 (Average)	109	0.74

TABLE II.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Road Accidents</u>	<u>Drunken Drivers &amp; Pedestrians In- volved in Accidents</u>	<u>%</u>
Japan	1965	527,286	36,510	6.4
Spain	1961	21,131	316	1.4
Israel	1967	10,869	37	0.34

TABLE III.

<u>Area</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Drivers Involved In Accidents</u>	<u>Blood Alcohol &gt; 50mg%</u>	<u>%</u>
Toronto, Canada	1955	423	95	22.5
Baltimore, U.S.A.	1951/56	156 <sup>+</sup>	91	58.3
Perth, Australia	1950/60	51 <sup>+</sup>	17	33.5
Brisbane, Australia	1966	149	57	38.3
Israel	1966/68	163 <sup>+</sup>	0	0

+ = killed

TABLE IV.

Traffic Accidents Per 1,000 Population, 1967

<u>Country</u>	<u>Injured</u>	<u>Fatalities</u>
Poland	0.85	0.09
Turkey	0.87	0.1
Jordan	1.00	0.1
Greece	2.45	0.09
Sweden	2.56	0.11
Norway	2.66	0.12
Netherlands	4.84	0.22
Switzerland	5.21	0.24
<u>Israel</u>	5.48	0.14
France	6.19	0.25
Japan	6.55	0.15
Great Britain	6.58	0.13
Germany	8.00	0.29
U.S.A. (1966)	9.54	0.26
Austria	9.82	0.19