



Grapes, Wine and Kilei Hakerem #2

The standard practice for growing table grapes in Israel today includes clearing out all weeds from the vineyards for various reasons, so it is safe to assume that there is little chance of interplanting in table grape vineyards. Until recently, this has also been the standard practice for wine grape cultivation: clearing out any weeds that might compete for water and mineral resources and thereby minimize the risk of pests and the spread of disease.

Recent years have seen the beginning of a new trend of leaving weeds in the vineyard; or, alternatively, planting various cover crops alongside them, also known as intercropping or interplanting. Intercropping is not a new method for orchards, but until recently it was rarely used in vineyards. There are several reasons that farmers intercrop:

1. Preventing soil erosion and drift

-There are vineyards planted on steep inclines or declines, which are subject to topsoil drift due to rain. Leaving weeds in place or planting annual crops with extensive root systems helps minimize this problem.

2. An agro-ecological ideology that values sustainability, both short-term and long-term - According to this general outlook, any harm done to plants

or animals is wasteful and needless. The basis for this thinking, with some limitations, is not new and can be found in Torah sources, as the Midrash states: “See to it that you do not degrade and destroy my world, for if you destroy it no one will be there to fix it up after you” (Midrash Raba, Kohelet 7:1).

3. Minimizing pesticide use - Avoiding spraying the grapes with poisonous chemicals reduces the risk of harming the soil, the greater environment, and the people who consume the produce.

4. Maintaining the beneficial insect population - Leaving weeds or cover crops after blooming and seed dispersal attracts and maintains the beneficial insect population. At the same time, it could provide forage for pests that can destroy the plants or fruit, and then the harm outweighs the benefit. This approach goes together with on ongoing monitoring of the populations of beneficial insects and pests and maintaining a healthy balance between them, as is standard practice in organic farming. At times, farmers pay a heavy price with the diminishing of quality and quantity of the harvest, but generally receive in compensation higher profit for their organic produce. In the case at hand of leaving weeds in the vineyard, the wine is branded “healthy wine.” ■