

ONEG SHABBAS

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Drinking & Eating While Seeing God

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

Following God's command to Moses to ascend Mount Sinai with the leaders of our people (Ex. 24:1-2), a very curious episode occurs towards the end of our Torah portion (Ex. 24:9-11):

וַיַּעַל מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן נָדָב וְאָבִיהוּא וְשִׁבְעֵים מִזְקֵנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וַיֵּרְאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַתַּחַת רַגְלָיו כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לִבְנֵת הַסַּפִּיר וְכַעֲצָם הַשָּׁמַיִם לְטָהָר וְאֶל-אַצִּילֵי בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא שָׁלַח יְדוֹ וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת-הָאֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאכְלוּ וַיִּשְׁתּוּ:

Moses, Aaron, Nadav, Avihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended and they saw the God of Israel under Whose feet was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity. Yet [God] did not raise a hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they beheld God, and they ate and drank.

While there is a lot to unpack out of this story, one aspect I find fascinating is that while up on the mountain and seeing God, as well as the gorgeous appearance beneath God's feet, they decide to eat and - yes, you guessed it - drink. While eating and drinking may not have been the first action in one's mind to do while seeing God at a certain height, that is what these leaders do.

Or did they? Two rabbinic leaders from the early third century debate this point (*Midrash Tanhuma, Aharei Mot* §6, *Pesikta D'Rav Kahanna* §26:9, and *Vayikra Rabbah* §20:10):

אָמַר רַבִּי הוֹשֵׁי'א, וְכִי קָלוּרִין עֲלֵתָה עִמָּהֶן לְסִינֵי דְאַתְּ אֲמַרְתָּ וַיַּחֲזוּ אֶת

הָאֱלֹהִים. אֵלָּא מִלְּמַד, שֶׁזָּנּוּ עֵינֵיהֶם מִן הַשְּׂכִינָה, כְּאָדָם שֶׁמֵבִיט בְּחֵבֶרָה מִתּוֹךְ מֵאֲכָל וּמִשְׁתֶּה.
רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן אָמַר, אֲכִילָה וְיָדָא, דְּכִתְבִי: בְּאוֹר פְּנֵי מֶלֶךְ חַיִּים, וְרִצּוֹנוֹ כְּעַב (מִלְּקוּשׁ) (מִשְׁלֵי טו, טו)

Rabbi Hosha'ya said, "Did provisions go up with them to Sinai, since it says 'they beheld God, and they ate and drank'? It is simply that they feasted their eyes on the Divine Presence. [Hence they were] like someone who beholds his colleague in the midst of eating and drinking." Rabbi Yohanan said, "[There was] actual eating [and drinking], since it is written, 'In the light of the king's face there is life; His favor is like a rain cloud in spring (Prov. 16:15).'"

While it's possible they were simply hungry and thirsty. However, what if they were more than simply in need of food and drink?

Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270) wrote that "שעשו" They rejoiced and made a festival, since there is an obligation to rejoice at the reception of the Torah" (רמב"ן). Similarly, Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (1250-1310) wrote "כדרך" In the same manner as those who cut agreements" and "שהם הוצרכו לאכול ולשתות שנהנו מזיו שכינה" That they needed to eat and to drink, since they benefitted from the splendor of the Divine presence" (חזקוני).

While not all commentators (and certainly not all Medieval commentators) believed it was a necessarily happy occurrence, it seems that they had their reasons to feast.

Another reason, of course, could be that they knew they were taking a big risk, and they ended up surviving! They were incredibly nervous and, having survived the ordeal, they were happy to eat and to drink in God's presence.

Why did they haul all of that food and drink up with them? Perhaps they were ready to feast, and they came prepared to eat and to drink to fully enjoy beholding God.

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Who is Involved with Purim-Drinking?

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

Following-up from last week's discussion of **When** to drink on Purim, a further matter to consider is **Who** is supposed to drink on Purim?

When we consider the phrasing of the original statement by Rava (280–352 CE), it seems that Purim-drinking is for everyone: “מִיֵּחֵיֵב אִינִישׁ לְבִסוּמֵי בְּפוּרִיָּא עַד דְּלֵא יָדַע בֵּין אַרְוֵר הַמֶּן לְבְרוּךְ. א פֶּרְסִי A person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until one does not know the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordecai” (*Megillah* 7b). This statement is repeated verbatim by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) in his *Shulchan Arukh* (OH §695:2). But is getting drunk on Purim really for everyone?

Is there a gender difference? Are women expected to get drunk? According to a number of halakhic decisors, women are not (*Rivevos Ephraim* 1:458, 4:173:10, 53, *Mekadesh Yisroel Purim* 334, *Moadim V'zemanim* 2:190, *Natei Gavriel Purim* 73:4, *Shevet HaLevi* 10:18:2, and *Shulchan Aruch Hamekutzar* 123, n. 19 (Credit goes to Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits for compiling this list ("Drinking on Purim", *Halakhically Speaking* 10:3 (2014), 12, n. 7)).

Is there an age difference? According to various halakhic decisors, children are not included in Purim-drinking (*Moadim V'zemanim* 2:190, *Teshuvos V'hanhagos* 3:229, and *Natei Gavriel Purim* 73:4, n. 10 (Credit for this list goes once again to Rabbi Lebovits (*Ibid.*, 13, n. 79))). Furthermore, there are many, many dangers associated with under-age drinking, as can be seen from the deeply unfortunate number of teenagers who end up in hospitals on Purim.

One further aspect to consider is that Rava is the Talmud's greatest wine-drinker, a fan of imbibing wine and clearly experienced at doing so. One wonders if he was used to having others around him who also were experienced drinkers, and perhaps even finding themselves happily inebriated on occasion.

If so, perhaps he made his statement in the sense of “If you're going to drink and get drunk on any number of occasions throughout the year, make sure to do so on Purim.” That way, one demonstrates that it is certainly the drinkingest day par excellence on the Jewish calendar. However, perhaps, for those not used to drinking, much less getting drunk, perhaps the obligation to get drunk is certainly less necessary. L'chaim!

Cincinnati Event to Explore What to Drink on Purim?



With Purim around the corner, Jewish Drinking is excited to announce an upcoming texts-and-tasting event.

Alongside a mezcal-tasting this coming Thursday, March 23rd, Rabbi Drew will be leading an exploration of Jewish texts throughout time and place on what to drink on Purim - is there anything specific or not?

While there is no mandatory fee for this event, there is a suggested minimum donation of \$18 to Jewish Drinking: <https://PayPal.me/JewishDrinking>



The Jewish Drinking Show is available on YouTube, as well as wherever you listen to podcasts

Newest Episode

This week's episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* features Udi Zinar discussing Kiddush Club experiences, following-up from last week's episode on "Kiddush Clubs as Mens' Clubs".

Kiddush Club Experiences



Upcoming Episodes

With Purim around the corner, the next two episodes of *The Jewish Drinking Show* focus on Purim:
February 21st - *Massekhet Purim*, an 18th century Purim parody, featuring Prof. Richard Sarason
February 28th - 18th and 19th century *aharonim* on Purim-drinking, featuring Rabbi David Fried

If you are, or know of someone, who struggles with alcohol abuse, alcoholism, or other substance abuse, there are resources out there to help, which are available at JewishDrinking.com/AlcoholAbuse