

# ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

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## Serving Under the Influence?

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### Introduction

In this week's Torah portion, we not only encounter a very direct prohibition against drinking, but also the very first appearance of beer in the entirety of the Bible, all in the same verse: וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל־אַהֲרֹן לֵאמֹר: יִין וְשֵׁכָר אַל־תִּשְׁתַּי וְלֹא תִמְתּוּ עֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: וְלֹהוֹרֹת אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־כָּל־הַחֲקִים אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר ה' אֲלֵיהֶם בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה "And The LORD spoke to Aaron, saying: 'Drink neither wine nor beer, you or your sons, when you enter the Tent of Meeting, that you may not die. This is a law for all time throughout the ages, for you must distinguish between the sacred and the profane, and between the impure and the pure; and you must teach the Israelites all the laws which The LORD has imparted to them through Moses'" (Lev. 10:8-11).

### The Prohibition

While we don't typically think of Judaism as having a prohibition against drinking, it is a limited prohibition, as it does not affect all Jews, only the descendants of Aharon, known as the kohanim. Not only that, it does not affect kohanim at all times, rather only when going to serve in the Tent of Meeting. Basically, this is a Divine prohibition against Kohanim drinking on the job, as God wants Kohanim to maintain a clear head while serving, especially in order to preserve the necessary distinctions of holy/unholy and pure/impure.



With Passover now in our rearview mirror, you may have used up a lot of wines and might be looking to restock your wine supply. If you need a discount on wines, go to [JewishDrinking.com](http://JewishDrinking.com) and click on the KoshersWine.com discount logo and you get \$15 off orders of \$200 or more.

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### Beer's Introduction in the Bible

Part of this prohibition includes the first Biblical appearance of beer, which is only surprising that beer had not been previously mentioned. However, it makes great sense that God would make beer off-limits for serving on-duty, as it, too, is alcoholic, just like wine. Moreover, if wine were the only prohibited beverage, perhaps beer could be consumed either while on the job or before going to work. This may be beer's most notable appearance in the Torah, as it only appears several further times (Numbers 6.3 (x2) & 28.7 and Deuteronomy 14.26 & 29.5), although one of them includes the Nazir's swearing-off from beer or wine, which is not dissimilar from the prohibition in our parashah. While we do not typically associate beer with being a Biblical beverage, archaeological evidence of it in the land of Israel goes back even further than the earliest archaeological evidence of wine.

### Midrashic Association with Aharon's Sons' Deaths

Inasmuch as it is tempting to consider this prohibition in a vacuum, it has a literary context, immediately following the death of two sons of Aharon (Lev. 10:1-7). It is extremely hard to ignore the proscription against Aharon's sons serving in the Tent of Meeting so that they do not die and not connect it with the preceding story in which two of Aharon's sons die while performing service in the Tent of Meeting.

As such, there are numerous midrashim which make this connection, such as Rabbi Yishmael saying in the early second century, "תני רבי ישמעאל לא מתו שני בניו של אהרן אלא מפני שגכסו" Rabbi Yishmael taught: 'Aharon's two sons only died on account of having entered the Tent of Meeting while drinking wine'" (*Vayikra Rabbah* 12:5), which Rabbi Shimon is also later recorded as having taught later on in the second century (*Vayikra Rabbah* 12:1).

Building off of these second century rabbis, in the third century, Rabbi Pinhas quoted in Rabbi Levi's name a parable about a king who had a close friend (*Vayikra Rabbah* 12:1). This parable is mentioned by Rabbi Shlomo Yizhaki (1040-1105) in his commentary on the deaths of Aharon's sons (Rashi, Lev. 10:2).

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Oneg Shabbas is a project of Jewish Drinking, Inc., a 501(c)3 initiative to educate about drinking in Jewish wisdom, tradition, history, practice, and more in order to enrich people's lives. This publication is composed by, edited by, and published by Rabbi Drew Kaplan. If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, he can be reached at

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### Alternative Explanation to Aharon's Sons' Deaths

Nevertheless, there is still something missing in this description of Nadav's and Avihu's deaths. After all, it was a strange fire, so what was going on?

Having mentioned Rashi's account of their deaths, I found the explanation of Rabbi Moses ben Naḥman (1194-1270) to be quite fascinating: "הטעם בצואה הזאת עתה שלא יתעה הכהן בשכרות" היין ויבא לידי מחשבה שאינה כהוגן וימות בה כאשר עשו בניו ויתכן כי מה שדרשו (ויק"ר יב א) שהיו נדב ואביהוא שתווי יין לומר כי מפני יינם טעו באש זרה לא שיהיה העונש מפני היין כי עדיין לא הוזהרו ממנו אבל עונשם שטעו The reason why this commandment was given at that time, was in order that the priest should not go astray through the intoxicating effect of wine, and thus come to entertain some improper thought which might cause his death, as happened to [Aaron's] sons. It is possible that when the Rabbis interpreted that Nadav and Avihu died because they entered the Sanctuary whilst intoxicated by wine, they meant to say that it was because of the wine they had drunk

that they erred in the matter of the strange fire, but not that their punishment actually was because they had drunk the wine, since they had not yet been warned against it. Rather, their punishment was because they erred with respect to the fire of God, as I have alluded to" (Ramban, Lev. 10:9).

I have found this explanation quite fascinating, as it does not squarely place the problem on Nadav and Avihu for simply having been intoxicated, but rather due to their having offered a strange fire.

### Conclusion

While it is unclear precisely what was problematic about the strange fire that Nadav and Avihu brought, it is not entirely clear that they did so while intoxicated. At the same time, it is hard to consider that drinking had not been a part of the equation, as this prohibition is immediately juxtaposed to this tragic story. There is a time and a place for drinking and there is a time and a place for not drinking.

לחיים!

## Newest Episode

The most recent episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* published right before Passover on April 4th features Professor Samuel Levine, professor of law and director of the Jewish Law Institute at Touro Law Center, discussing a rabbinic responsum during the Holocaust concerning the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, despite the inability to procure any wine. Based on his "Jewish Law From out of the Depths: Tragic Choices in the Holocaust" article, *The Jewish Drinking Show's* first Holocaust episode welcomes Professor Levine to discuss this matter on the 131st episode of the show. While Passover has just concluded, the discussion is timely, as *Yom HaShoah* (Holocaust Remembrance Day) takes place in just a few days. The episode, in both video and podcast format, is available The Jewish Drinking Show is available on YouTube, as well as wherever you listen to podcasts at [JewishDrinking.com/Holocaust4Cups](http://JewishDrinking.com/Holocaust4Cups).



## Upcoming Episodes

April 25 – Rabbi Zachary Goodman – Reform Responses to Prohibition  
May 2 – Prof. Jordan Finkin – Yiddish Drinking Terms

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



## Wine Wednesday Events

Building on recent Texts-and-Tasting Events in Cincinnati led by Rabbi Drew in February and March, Rabbi Drew will be leading Texts-and-Tasting Events in both April and May. Featuring a wine-tasting of six different wines, Texts-And-Tasting led by Rabbi Drew Kaplan featuring a wine-tasting on topics to be announced.

In addition to a regular event, we also have the pleasure of tasting wines for review supplied by [KosherWine.com](http://KosherWine.com). For those interested, we will also shoot a review video for those who would like to be included.

These events will be taking place on Wednesday 26 April at 8pm and a Wednesday 3 May at 8pm, with locations to be provided. While there is no charge to attend these events, donations are encouraged and wonderfully welcomed. Any questions or suggestions, please reach out to Rabbi Drew Kaplan at [Drew@JewishDrinking.com](mailto:Drew@JewishDrinking.com)



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](http://JewishDrinking.com/AlcoholAbuse)