

ONEG SHABBAS

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Rosh HaShanah Through the Drinking Glass

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

When it comes to considering holidays through the perspective of drinking, Rosh HaShanah sticks out quite curiously. Indeed, while the other holidays are all considered חגים (festivals), only Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur remain. However, as Yom Kippur is the only Torah-mandated day to refrain from drinking, that leaves Rosh HaShanah all alone. So how do we consider Rosh HaShanah from the perspective of drinking?

Clearly, we need to go back to the Torah to begin considering our behavior on Rosh HaShanah, where we read that זָכְרוֹן וְזִמְרוֹן יִהְיֶה לָכֶם שְׁבִתוֹן וְזִמְרוֹן יִהְיֶה לָכֶם מִקְרָא קִדְשׁ וְתִרְוַעָה מִקְרָא קִדְשׁ "it shall be a rest day of blast-remembering, a sacred occasion" (Lev. 23:24) and כָּל־מְלָאכַת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ "you shall not do laborious work" (Lev. 23:25). We also similarly read מִקְרָא קִדְשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם וְתִרְוַעָה יִהְיֶה לָכֶם "It shall be a sacred occasion for you, you shall not work at your occupations, it shall be a blasting-day for you" (Num. 29:1). From these verses, Rosh HaShanah is not marked off by being a festival, but clearly a day free from labor.

So, how do the rabbis of the Talmud frame Rosh HaShanah? While the rabbis describe festivals to have rejoicing carried out on them to be done with wine (*Pesachim* 109a), Rosh HaShanah is notably not a festival, so it has no inherent quality of rejoicing.

We read that one is not supposed to fast on Rosh HaShanah, as Rabbi Akiva clearly states in the second century: בְּרִאשׁ הַשָּׁנָה מִתְרַעֵין אֲבָל לֹא "On Rosh HaShanah, we blast, but we do not fast" (*yTa'anit* 3:3). A more colorful description concerning the normative behavior expected on Rosh HaShanah is that described by a third-century sage, either Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina (d. 250), or Rabbi Hoshaya (*yRosh Hashanah* 1:3):



"Is there a nation like this nation? The common practice of the world is that someone who knows he is on trial wears black and wraps himself in black and lets his beard grow since he does not know how his trial will turn out. But that is not how it is with Israel. Rather, on the day of their trial, they wear white and shave their beards and eat, drink, and rejoice, for they know that the Holy One, blessed be He, does miracles for them."

אי זו אומה כאומה הזאת בנוהג שבכולם אדם יודע שיש לו דין לובש שחורים ומתעטף שחורים ומגדל זקנו שאינו יודע היאך דינו יוצא אבל ישראל אינו כן אלא לובשים לבנים ומתעטפן לבנים ומגלחין זקנם ואוכלין ושותין ושמחים יודעין שהקב"ה עושה להן ניסים

This line of drinking (as well as eating and rejoicing) for the Jewish people know that the Holy One, blessed be He, does miracles for them is certainly an intriguing approach, clearly indicating that, by all rights, we should not continue to live, owing to our faults, yet, we will still endure, thus, we should celebrate by drinking, eating, and rejoicing.

Indeed, a millennium later, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340) wrote ואין ושותין ושמחין ואין "We eat, drink, and are merry [on Rosh HaShanah], and it is forbidden to fast at all" (*Tur* OH 597). Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) further ratified this formulation of our normative consumptive behaviors on Rosh HaShanah, when he wrote (*SA* OH 597:1):

We eat, drink, and are happy [on Rosh HaShanah], and we fast neither on Rosh Hashanah nor on Repentance Shabbat. However, people should not eat to the fullness of their satiety so that they do not come to levity in order that there should be awe of the Lord upon their faces.

אוכלים ושותים ושמחים ואין מתענין בראש השנה ולא בשבת שובה אמנם לא יאכלו כל שבעם למען לא יקלו ראשם ותהיה יראת ה' על פניהם

While Rabbi Karo certainly advocates eating, drinking, and enjoying Rosh HaShanah, he also looks to balance this consumptive behavior, urging a limit to one's consumptive activities. Where does it come from?

Elsewhere, he wrote כ' בשם ספר אגודה אמנם האוכלים בר"ה לא יאכלו כל "I have found that Rabbi Alexander Süsslein HaKohen (d. 1349) wrote in his *Collection Book* that nonetheless, one should not eat one's fill, so that one does not act lightly-mindedly, and the fear of God should remain..." (*Joseph's House* OH 597). Clearly, Rabbi Karo sought out a balance between acting too seriously and acting not seriously enough with one's consumptive practices on Rosh HaShanah.

{continued on next page}

Aryeh Lebowitz @bknwrabbi

Woman at the liquor store on Erev Rosh hashana: "Which holiday do you guys have today?"

Me: "The Jewish New Year"

Woman: "so you guys are gonna party tonight?!"

Me: "no, its actually more about introspection and repentance"

Woman (sees 2 cases of wine in my cart): "uh huh"

10:50 PM · Sep 27, 2022

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Further amplifying this approach is Rabbi Yisrael Meir ha-Kohen Kagan (1838-1933), who described it as

Even though it is Judgement Day, nevertheless, there is a mitzvah of rejoicing on your holiday that is relevant to this day that it is also within the category of חג, as it is written, "Blast the horn at the new moon, at the full moon for our feast-day" (Ps. 81.4), and it is said in Nehemiah, "eat fatty foods and drink sweet drinks...for this day is holy unto our Lord; do not be sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8.10).

אף שהוא יום הדין מכל מקום מצוה של ושמחת בחגך שייך גם בו שגם הוא בכלל חג כדכתיב תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו ונאמר בנחמיה ח' אכלו משמנים ושתו ממתקים וגו' כי קדוש היום לאדונינו ואל תעצבו כי חדות ד' היא מעוזכם

owing to our being judged, yet, despite the medieval trend of seeking to fast, the overwhelming approach to our behavior on Rosh HaShanah has been the Talmudic approach of being different from other nations - not seeking to be sad on our judgment day, but to embrace it through eating, drinking, and enjoying what we are experiencing. However, as opposed to a festival, such as Sukkot, in which we aspire to fully celebrate, we also



While this last line is from the *hakhel* ceremony in Nehemiah, it took place on Rosh HaShanah, which helps serve as a model for drinking enjoyable beverages on Rosh HaShanah.

While Rosh HaShanah sticks out as the only non-festival holiday (aside from Yom Kippur) and it could be positioned merely as a sad

L'chaim 🍷

Newest Episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*



Continuing the "Toast to Israel at 75" mini-series, this week's episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* features Doug Greener, the beer columnist for *The Jerusalem Post*, where shares about contemporary beer trends in Israel, as well as an abbreviated history of craft beer in Israel. The episode is available at JewishDrinking.com/IsraelBeerTrends



While there are still three more episodes in the "Toast to Israel at 75" series, you can check out previous episodes at JewishDrinking.com/IsraelToast75

Rosh HaShanah Resources

With Rosh HaShanah here, as well as the ten days of repentance, you may be interested in the 44th episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, "Drinking During the Ten Days of Repentance: An Introduction", to hear about drinking during this time of year.

A clip from that episode focussing on drinking on Rosh HaShanah is available at JewishDrinking.com/RHDrinkingClip.

If you're interested in suggestions for Rosh HaShanah cocktails, in a deleted clip from *The Jewish Drinking Show* last year, Dan Rabinowitz shares some ideas, which is available at JewishDrinking.com/RHCocktailsDan.

For further cocktail ideas for Rosh HaShanah, check out JewishDrinking.com/RHCocktails, a few examples of which are available to the right:

Apples & Honey Whisky

Ingredients:
1.5 oz honey whisky
sparkling cider, preferably dry

Directions:
In a champagne flute, add the honey whisky and top with cider.

Source:
Jay Rosen

Unnamed Rosh HaShanah Cocktail

Ingredients:
2 ounces of Jameson Irish Whiskey
1/2 ounce of Berentzen Apple Liqueur
1/2 ounce of honey syrup (1/4 ounce of water and 1/4 ounce of honey stirred together)

a dash of Angostura aromatic bitters

Directions:
Mix ingredients in a glass with ice, then strain into a chilled cocktail glass, and enjoy!

Source:
Drew Kaplan

Pomegranate G&T

Ingredients:
1.5 oz dry gin
0.5 oz sweet vermouth or sherry
0.5 oz pomegranate juice
tonic water
ice

Directions:
Pour the gin in a lowball or highball glass. Add the vermouth or sherry and juice, and carefully swirl the glass. Fill with ice, top with tonic water and serve.

Recipe & Photo Source:
Jay Rosen

