

## Wine-Libating Vessels? Rabbi Drew Kaplan

As humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27) and humans drink, so, too, God drinks, thus, we have libations in our tradition. While the first libation to God recorded in the Torah is when Jacob pours a libation to God at Beth-El (Gen. 35:14), we do not read of God commanding libations... at least until next week's Torah portion. However, in this week's Torah portion, libations might be mentioned.

## The Possibility for Libating Utensils

Before we get to God commanding libations in next week's Torah portion, perhaps God commands the creation of vessels for them, as we read (Ex. 25:29): אַשָׁיָר אָבֶריָאו אָבָעריָאו אַנַקּיֹתִיו אַנַקיֹתִיו אַשָּׁר אָקָ

While this verse seems in Hebrew that it might potentially speak of libating, how is it to be translated into English?

## A Talmudic Description

According to a late third-century sage, this whole verse is in need of description, as Rav Ketina understands this verse to state "And you shall make its molds, its bowls, its four panels of gold, and its rods with which to cover the bread" (*Menahot* 97a). In his understanding, these utensils, as they are being mentioned with regards to the table for the showbread, are intended to be for the purposes of the showbread. Moreover, the word סי is not about pouring/libating, but covering the showbread. According to Rabbi Shlomo Yitzḥaki (1040-1105), this covering is achieved through שעל herence between the between the hallah and its neighbor" (בין הל הבירתה של מנחות צ"ז., ד"ה שמסכנין בהן את הלחם).



### **Medieval Commentaries**

By and large, Medieval Jewish יסך יסך as covering, such as Rabbi Shlomo Yitzḥaki (1040-1105) and his grandson, Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (1085-1158) (see ישי על שמות כ״ה:כ״ט, ד"ה רשב"ם על שמות כ״ה:כ״ט, ד"ה קשותיו ומנקיותיו Yoseph ben Yitzḥak Bekhor Shor of Orléans (12th century) understood יסר in a libational sense: קשותיו כלים שנותנים בהם

יונסך שהיו מנסכין הימנו המים על גבי הסולת ללושו "its *keshot* are vessels into which they placed water to knead the bread, as it is written, 'and the libation jugs' (Num. 4:7), that they libated/poured water from them onto fine flour to knead it" (ערותיו וכפותיו קערותיו בכור שור, שמות כ״ה:כ״ט, ד"ה ועשית קערותיו וכפותיו).

While we read in his commentary that this is our first explicit articulation

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# Celebrating 14 Adar I? Rabbi Drew Kaplan

Curious as it is, how do we celebrate the 14th of Adar I? In leap years, such as this year, when we get a bonus Adar, are we supposed to do anything for what would otherwise be Purim? It might seem that it is not necessarily a day to do anything special, yet we read in the Mishnah (Megillah 1:4):

The only difference between the first Adar and the second Adar is the reading of the Megillah and gifts to the poor.

אֵין בֵּין אֲדָר הָרָאשׁוֹן לַאֲדָר הַשֵׁנִי אֶלָא קְרִיאַת הַמְגִלָה וּמַתָּנוֹת לָאֶבְיוֹנִים

It would seem from this Mishnah that, despite the 14th day of second Adar eclipsing it as the day upon which we should be celebrating Purim, perhaps the 14th day of the first Adar retains something special. Indeed, we read that fasting and eulogizing are forbidden on 14 Adar I (*Megillah* 6b), so it would seem that it is not merely a normal day.

#### **Medieval Rabbis**

In the medieval era, there were rabbis who understood 14 Adar I as a day upon which to celebrate, while others were unsure of the need to do so. Indeed, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340) quoted Rabbi Yitzḥak ben Jacob Alfasi (1013–1103) as having written that "one needs to increase one's meal on the 14th of Adar 1, but that one does not need to increase one's meal on the 15th of Adar 1" (עור, אורח חיים תרצ״ז:א׳), although Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher is not entirely keen on the need to do so.

Similarly, the Tosafistic authors reported that ויש שנוהגין לעשות ימי משתה משרה בארבעה עשר ובחמשה עשר של אדר הראשון there are some that are accustomed to making days of drinking-parties and joy on the fourteenth and fifteenth of the first Adar", although was uncomfortable seeing that as the halakhah, concluding that השמה ושמתה ושמחה לעשות משתה לעשות הלכה שאין צריך להחמיר לעשות משתה ושמחה the law (halakha) is that there is no need to be stringent to make drinking-parties and joy in the first Adar" (אליעזר ברבי יוסי אליעזר ברבי יוסי).

In addition to quoting this Tosafistic approach, Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) quoted further rabbis (בית יוסף, אורח חיים תרצ״ז::):

Rabbi Meir HaKohen (end of the 13th והגהות מיימונית century) wrote [in his] Hagahot כתבו בשם סמ"ק Maimonit, quoting Rabbi Yitzhak ben שהעולם לא נהגו Yoseph of Corbeil (d. 1280)'s Sefer לעשות משתה Mitzvot Katan, "That throughout the ושמחה כי אם world, people are generally בי"ד שבאדר accustomed to making drinking-parties הראשון אע"פ nor merriment only on 14 Adar I, even שבאדר השני נהגו though people are accustomed to גם בט"ו שמחה making merriment and drinking-parties ומשתה וטעמא on both 14 and 15 Adar II. And the משום דאמר reason is on account of the Talmudic תלמודא אין בין י"ד statement that there is no difference שבאדר הראשוו between 14 of Adar...and it doesn't וכו' ולא הזכיר ט"ו mention 15 Adar I."

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that יסך can be meant in the sense of libation. What is curiously ambiguous, however, is that the same verse that Rabbi Bekhor Shor used is the exact same verse that Rabbi Yitzḥaki used, so that verse remains unclear as to how it should be used in relation to the verse in front of us. Indeed, there seems to be some lacking in consensus amongst the commentaries as to how the terms in this verse are to be translated (see אבן עזרא על שמות כ״ה:כ״ט, ד"ה ומלת אשר יוסך בהן ורמב"ן על אבן נחרא והקבלה, the context as the 19th century (שמות כ״ה:כ״ט, ד"ה יסך בהן).

#### **Contemporary Translations**

With this aforementioned lack of consensus, when we look at contemporary English translations of this verse, we see translations in both directions, beginning with the non-libation understanding:

- "You shall make its dishes, its spoons, its shelving-tubes, and its pillars, with which it shall be covered; of pure gold shall you make them." (Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Artscroll))
- "You shall make its bowls and its spoons and its tubes and its supports with which it shall be covered. From pure gold you shall make them." (Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz (Koren))
- "For [the table] make bread forms, incense bowls, and side frames, as well as the half tubes that will serve as dividers [between the loaves of bread]. All these shall be made of pure gold." (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan (*The Living Torah*))

I must note that while Rabbi Steinsaltz' version is actually translated by someone else, it would seem the translation of his words accurately reflect how he sees this verse, especially since both Rabbi Steinsaltz and Rabbi Kaplan were Chabad rabbis, which may also have been why they both understand אשר יסך בהן not in the sense of libational purposes (even though their translations for each of the items within the verse differ from one another).

While these aforementioned translations do not reflect anything to do with libations, there are, however, others that specifically mention libating:

- "And thou shalt make the dishes thereof, and the pans thereof, and the jars thereof, and the bowls thereof, wherewith to pour out; of pure gold shalt thou make them." (Rabbi JH Hertz (Soncino))
- "Make its bowls, ladles, jars and jugs with which to offer libations; make them of pure gold." (NJPS)
- "You must also make, out of pure gold, its bowls, spoons, pitchers, and jars for pouring libations." (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Koren))

In this set of understandings, it seems that God is establishing that, before one can pour/libate, one needs the appropriate vessels to do so.

#### Conclusion

While up to and including our parashah, there has not yet been any divine command to libate, we do encounter a verse in this week's Torah portion that could be interpreted/translated as using vessels for libation, as we will read in next week's Torah portion the command to libate. Would it not make sense to provide a vessel for libation in order to then libate therewith? However, there is some ambiguity, as well as differing translations for the items in the verse, providing the opening for multiple understandings of this verse. Either way, whether these utensils are intended for libations, as it would seem, or for the showbread table where they are mentioned, they are definitely meant to be made of pure gold. If they are, indeed, meant for pouring wine for God, however, golden wine-pouring vessels are certainly a stylish and fancy way to provide wine for God. Perhaps this could inspire us, since we are made in God's image, to use well-appointed vessels for our drinking. L'chaim 🔻

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Writing in the 16th century, however, Rabbi Karo then concludes ערשון שבאדר הראשון "But now, we are accustomed to increase our feasting on neither the 14th, nor 15th of the first Adar." Indeed, he does not even mention anything about celebrating this day in his famed work, Shulhan Arukh. However, thereupon Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530-1572) does, indeed, mention this possibility (ערמ"א על שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים תרצ״ז:אי):

| There are those who say that one is obligated to increase in drinking and | י"א שחייב<br>להרבות במשתה |
|---|---------------------------|
| joy on the 14th of Adar I (Rabbi  | ושמחה בי"ד                |
| Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340)   | שבאדר ראשון               |
| quoting Rabbi Yitzḥak ben Jacob Alfasi                                    | (טור בשם                  |
| (1013–1103)).   | הרי"ף)                    |
| But, we are not accustomed this way.                                      | ואין נוהגין כן            |
| Nevertheless, one should increase   | מ"מ ירבה קצת              |
| their feasting slightly, in order to fulfill                              | בסעודה כדי                |
| the opinion of those who are stringent                                    | לצאת ידי                  |
| (Rabbi Meir HaKohen (end of the 13th                                      | המחמירים                  |
| century) quoting Rabbi Yitzḥak ben  | (הג"מ בשם                 |
| Yoseph of Corbeil (d. 1280)).   | סמ"ק)                     |
| And "the good-hearted has a continual                                     | וטוב לב משתה              |
| drinking-party" (Prov. 15:15).  | תמיד                      |

In commenting subsequently, Rabbi David HaLevi Segal (1586-1667) wrote (אור קצת בסעוד'): שולחן ערוך אורח חיים תרצ"ז:בי, ד"ה מ"מ ירבה קצת בסעוד'):

| • |   |                 |  |
|---|---|-----------------|--|
|   | Rabbi Shimson ben Zadok (d. 1312)       | מ"מ ירבה קצת    |  |
|   | wrote that one should increase          | בסעוד' כו'.     |  |
|   | (Tashbetz Commentary §178), and         | בהג"ה תשב"ץ סי' |  |
|   | Rabbi Yeḥiel of Paris (d. 1268) was     | קע"ח כ' דיש     |  |
|   | accustomed to increase and to invite    | להרבות ורבינו   |  |
|   | people, according to the straight-      | יחיאל מפרי"ש    |  |
|   | forward understanding of the Mishnah:   | רגיל להרבות     |  |
|   | "The only difference between Adar I     | ולהזמין בני אדם |  |
|   | and Adar II is the reading of the       | כמשמעות לשון    |  |
|   | megillah and gifts to the poor"         | המשנה אין בין   |  |
|   | (Megillah 1:4). And it is brilliant how | אדר כו' ושפיר   |  |
|   | Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530-1572)        | מסיים רמ"א כאן  |  |
|   | concludes here: "And a good-minded      | וטוב לב משתה    |  |
|   | person always enjoys drinking-parties." | תמיד            |  |
|   |   |                 |  |

Later on, Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan (1838-1933) largely quotes Rabbi Segal, then concludes with (משנה ברורה תרצ"ז:הי):

| "And a good-minded person is                | וטוב לב משתה    |
|---|-----------------|
| continually enjoying drinking-parties" is   | תמיד היינו שטוב |
| that it is good to increase one's drinking- | להרבות לכבוד    |
| parties out of honor of the miracle that    | הנס שנעשה       |
| occurred during these times.                | בעתים הללו      |

#### Conclusion

While there were many medieval rabbis who saw the words of the Mishnah as indicating that one either should enjoy oneself through drinking parties on 14 Adar I, or perhaps even requiring that it is necessary to do so, there were also other rabbis who were uncomfortable requiring this celebration. Although Rabbi Karo and Rabbi Isserles observed in their communities in the 16th century that such practices had fallen into disuse on 14 Adar I, subsequent rabbis were supportive of those who want to celebrate this date. Ultimately, no rabbi ever wrote that it was inappropriate. As we are about to encounter 14 Adar I this upcoming Thursday night and Friday, hopefully, this will get us into the mindset to celebrate  $\bigcirc$ 

