

# ONEG SHABBAS

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## Fetal Drinking?

Rabbi Drew Kaplan



While we typically think of Jewish drinking in our own lives and experiences we can remember, one aspect of drinking we typically don't consider is fetal drinking. No, I do not mean getting drunk and ending up in a fetal position; I mean drinking while being a fetus. As our Torah portion opens up about pregnancy (Lev. 12:1-8), there are some rabbinic midrashim that discuss this aspect of drinking.

As part of his description of the fetal experience, one of the Talmud's most famous expounders shared in the third century (*Niddah* 30b):

Rabbi Simlai expounded: "To what is a fetus in its mother's womb comparable? To a folded notebook. And it rests with its hands on its two sides, its two arms on its two knees, and its two heels on its two buttocks, and its head rests between its knees, and its mouth is closed, and its umbilicus is open. And it eats from what its mother eats, and it drinks from what its mother drinks, and it does not emit excrement lest it kill its mother. But once it emerges into the airspace of the world, the closed limb, i.e., its mouth opens, and the open limb, its umbilicus, closes, as otherwise it cannot live for even one hour...."

דרש רבי שמלאי למה הולד דומה במעי אמו לפנקס שמקופל ומונח ידיו על שתי צדעיו שתי אציליו על ב' ארכובותיו ובי' עקביו על ב' עגבותיו וראשו מונח לו בין ברכיו ופיו סתום וטבורו פתוח ואוכל ממה שאמו אוכלת ושותה ממה שאמו שותה ואינו מוציא רעי שמא יהרוג את אמו וכיון שיצא לאויר העולם נפתח הסתום ונסתם הפתוח שאלמלא כן אינו יכול לחיות אפילו שעה אחת

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## Who Drinks the 4 Cups?

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

While the fair assumption for who is involved in consuming the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder would be simply men, what about women and children?



### Children Drinking Wine?

There is actually a very clear early text including them (*Pesachim* 108b):

All are obligated in these four cups, including men, women, and children. הכל חייבין בארבעה כוסות הללו, אֶחָד אֲנָשִׁים, וְאֶחָד יְלָדִים, וְאֶחָד תִּינוּקוֹת נָשִׁים.

However, Rabbi Yehudah immediately questions the wisdom of providing four cups of wine to children (*Pesachim* 108b-109a):

Rabbi Yehudah said: 'What benefit do children receive from wine? Instead, one distributes roasted grains and nuts to them on Passover eve, so that they will not sleep and they will ask.' אמר רבי יהודה: וְכִי מַה תּוֹעֵלֶת יֶשׁ לְתִינוּקוֹת בֵּינָן? אֵלֹא מַחֲלִיקִין לֵהֶן קִלְיוֹת וְאֶגְזִזִין בְּעֶרְבַּי פֶּסַח כְּדֵי שְׁלֵא יִשְׁנֻוּ וְיִשְׁאַלּוּ

Despite this, Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) wrote (שו"ע תע"ב:ט):

It is a mitzvah to place a cup [of wine] in front of each child who has reached the age of education. תִּינוּקוֹת שֶׁהִגִּיעוּ לְחִינוּךְ מִצְוָה לִיתֵן לְכָל אֶחָד כּוֹסוֹ לְפָנָיו

However, the need to provide each and every child a glass of wine for the four cups of wine is not necessarily universal, as Rabbi Eliyahu Spira (1660-1712) points out (אליהו רבה על שלחן ערוך אורח חיים תע"ב:י"ח):

Rabbi Zedekiah ben Abraham Anaw (13th century) wrote in his *Shibbolei HaLeket* ("Ears of Gleaning") that "one should drink the majority of one's cup with his children and other younger members of his house drinking from his cup a little bit, but not that everyone needs to have a cup." And similarly Rabbi David Abudarham (14th century) wrote upon this matter. ושבלי הלקט כתב דישתה רוב הכוס ובניו ובני ביתו הקטנים שותין הימנו מעט, אבל אין צריך כוס לכל אחד ואחד וכן כתב ר' דוד אבודרהם

### What about Women?

As to women, there is a very explicit third century explanation making sure they are included (*Pesachim* 108a-108b):

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: 'Women are obligated in the four cups since even they were part of that miracle.' אמר ר' יהושע בן לוי נשים חייבות בארבעה כוסות הללו שאף הן היו באותו הנס

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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.

## New Seder Episode Now Out

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* features an exploration of the relatively recent explanation that has spread throughout English haggadot for the dropping of wine at the Seder. Featuring Rabbi Dr. Zvi Ron, the 153rd episode is available on YouTube, podcast platforms, as well as at [JewishDrinking.com/SederDrops2](http://JewishDrinking.com/SederDrops2)

### Considering a Recent Explanation of Dropping Wine at the Passover Seder



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This is a standard for his way of thinking, as he also included women in Hanukah candle-lighting (Shabbat 23a) and Megillah-reading (Megillah 4a). (For more on this, you can check out episode 63 of *The Jewish Drinking Show* featuring Miriam Gedweiser on "Women and the Four Cups of Wine at the Passover Seder"). Indeed, Rabbi Karo quotes this statement (שו"ע תע"ב:ד) and it seems to have been accepted without dissent.



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This is a rather curious description, although, as Dr. Jeremy Brown writes, it's actually not incorrect ("*Niddah* 30b ~ Talmudic Embryology", *Talmudology* (21 November 2019)):



Talmudic embryology reflected the prevailing Greek theories of the times. But those theories developed without the benefit of microscopes and the other tools later available to scientists. Despite this, sometimes the rabbis of the Talmud were spot on with their embryology. Today's statement of Rav Simlai is a good example. ... It is a perfect description of a growing fetus, written as if Rav Simlai was looking at Leonardo Da Vinci's famous sketch.

### Remaining in the Belly

As a fetus already begins drinking what its mother drinks while in its mother's belly, it is also impressive that it is able to remain in her belly (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14:3):

Rabbi Tahlfia of Caesarea said: "If a person eats one portion of food after another portion of food, does not the second portion expel the first? But no matter how much food a woman eats or how many beverages she drinks, the fetus is not expelled - is this not 'life and lovingkindness'?"

אמר רבי תחליפא דקסריא אם אכל אדם פרוסה אחר פרוסה לא שניה דוחה את הראשונה, האשה הזו כמה מאכל היא אוכלת וכמה משקים היא שותה ואינו דוחה הולד, אין זה חיים וחסד

### Post-Fetal Drinking

While gestational drinking has been the focus so far, there is also a midrash that describes the transition for providing for a fetus that then becomes a newborn (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14:3):

Rabbi Meir said: "All nine months that a woman does not see blood, she really should have seen it. What did The Holy Blessed One do? He removed (the blood) upward to her breasts and made it milk, so that when the baby was born there, food would be for him to eat. Even more so if it was a male child, as it says: 'When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male'."

אמר רבי מאיר כל תשעה חדשים שאין האשה רואה דם בדין הוא שתהא רואה, מה הקדוש ברוך הוא עושה מסלקו למעלה לדדיה ועושהו חלב, כדי שיצא הולד ויהיה לו מזון לאכל, וביותר אם היה זכר, שנאמר: אשה כי תרביע וילדה זכר

### Conclusion

Taken together, these rabbinic midrashim point to not only drinking as something that happens ex utero, but even in utero. Thus, it seems that the rabbis are pointing out drinking as a continual life-giving behavior, especially as we are developing in utero, preparing us for the post-gestational world. May all of our drinking provide us nourishment and life.

L'chaim 🍷

### Others?

However, women and children are not the only demographic to consider as potentially drinking or not drinking the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, as Rabbi Karo considers (בית יוסף, אורח חיים (תע"ב:ט"ו):

...Rabbi Shlomo ben Avraham ibn Aderet (1235-1310) wrote "The question of a person who does not drink wine all year long because it harms or he hates it - what should this person do; can he make the seder upon the matzah? He responded that it is logical that everyone who has wine needs to force himself [to drink wine at the Seder] and to do as Rabbi Yehudah son of Rabbi Ilai who said, 'I never taste any wine, except for that of kiddush, havdalah, and the four cups of Passover; and I tie my temples from Passover to Shavuot [in recovering from the pain]' (*Nedarim* 49b)..."

וצריך כל אדם לשתות ד' כוסות על הסדר שנפרש וכו' שם במשנה כתב הרשב"א שאלת מי שאינו שותה יין כל השנה כולה מפני שמזיקו או שונאו מהו שיעשה כל הסדר על הפת תשובה מסתברא שכל שיש לו יין צריך לדחוק עצמו ולעשות כר"י ב"ר אלעאי דלא הוא שתי חמרא ושתי ד' כוסות ואמר חוגרי צידי מפסחא ועד עצרת

In quoting Rabbi ibn Aderet, he then goes on to write that one should indeed force oneself to drink wine for the four cups even if it will give this person a headache (שו"ע או"ח תע"ב:י). In providing an explanation of this, Rabbi Yisrael Meir HaKohen Kagan (1838-1933) articulated (משנה ברורה תע"ב:ליה):

He means to say that it pains one to drink and results in a headache from this wine-drinking, but it is not within the category of causing one to be temporarily bedridden.

מפני שמזיקו - ר"ל שמצטער בשתייתו וכואב בראשו מזה ואין בכלל זה כשיפול למשכב מזה

In composing this, Rabbi Kagan here provides a boundary, such that if it were to result in this person having much worse pain than a headache, then they need not drink the wine. Rabbi Kagan also provides a helpful mitigation strategy in consuming wine for people who get headaches from wine-drinking (משנה ברורה תע"ב:ל"ז):

But one is able to dilute this wine a lot as long as it is still fitting to make Kiddush.

ארבע כוסות - ויכול למוגו היטב אכן בעיניו שיהא עדין ראוי לקידוש

### Conclusion

Our tradition is rich in that both men and women are to drink wine for the four statutory minimum cups at the Seder, although kids do not seem to be included so much (although that is, as you can read above, not without debate). Even one who yields headaches from drinking wine should, nevertheless, drink wine, although one can dilute the wine to lessen the potential headache. Two items that are for another treatment are what to do about pasteurized grape juice and those who struggle with alcohol misuse. Those deserve an entirely separate treatment, which I hope to cover in a future year.

L'chaim 🍷