

# ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

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Oneg Shabbas explores drinking in the weekly Torah portion, along with timely essays on drinking in Jewish life

## Let the Libations Flow

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

While libations come up in a variety of Torah portions, there is none like that of our parshah. This week's parashah features the absolute most amount of libations. Having written previously in this space that even though we typically consider Jewish drinking to be about human consumption, libations are a way for providing God with drinking wine, so to speak. As such, it is an important aspect of Jewish drinking - Divine drinking. Not only is it true that this Torah portion features the most appearances out of any Torah portion of this term, there are actually more appearances of the word in this Torah portion than in any other book of the Tanakh.

Prior to the book of Numbers, there are a total of 11 appearances of the word נסך in the books of Genesis, Exodus, and Leviticus, so it is pretty eye-popping when we encounter 27 - yes, 27 - occurrences of this term in our Torah portion. In total, there are 40 appearances of this term throughout the book of Numbers. Thus, these 13 other mentions of this term in the book of Numbers outside of our Torah portion are more numerous than all other mentions of this term in the rest of the Torah. As you can mathematically deduce, that means this week's Torah portion features the most amount of appearances of this term than in any other Torah portion...by a long shot. Furthermore, these 27 appearances of the word נסך in this week's Torah portion represents more than a quarter (28.7%) of all appearances

of the word in the entirety of the Tanakh. In fact, the next closest number of appearances in any book is 18 in Jeremiah, with no other book featuring a double-digit number of appearances in the Tanakh (for a listing of the appearance of this word amongst Biblical books, see the top ten list elsewhere on this page).

Not only is it simply a numbers game when we consider the amount of times this term appears in our Torah portion, but the sacrifices in our Torah portion are the primary location for regularly-scheduled recurring libations (with the sole exception of Lev., ch. 23), although not for others (such as Nazir (see Numbers, ch. 6)). So, what can we learn from libations in this week's Torah portion?

### Libations Are Not Independent

The libations that occur in our Torah portion are not independent, but rather part of a package of any given offering, featuring meat, along with a side of oily starch. "Offering an animal with accompanying non-animal materials, such as grain offerings and libations, is a kind of a 'combo-meal', as it were", writes Dr. Naphtali Meshel ("Which Sacrificial Offerings Require Libations?", *TheTorah.com*), describing a complete combo meal which "includes a burger, a soda, and fries (a starch prepared in oil and often salted)—or other combinations of food that together constitute a full meal.... A combination of only fries and a soda, however, is not licit: that is, while it is not illegal to order fries and a drink separately, they do not constitute a meal. This is reflected in the absence of such an option from most 'combo' menus."

For those less familiar with libations in our tradition, there is a standard formula: for a sheep, there is a corresponding quarter-*hin* libated, for a ram, a corresponding third-*hin*, and, for a bull, a corresponding half-*hin*. As far as how much volume a *hin* is, it's roughly a gallon-and-a-half.

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## Libations in the Bible: Top Ten List (& More)

Having mentioned that Numbers features the most amount of mentions of נסכים (libations) in the Bible in the other essay on this page, I hereby present the top ten books of the Bible in which libations appear, according to the most number of appearances (I also include the remainder that don't make the list):

(1) Numbers – 40 appearances: 4:7, 6:15, 6:17, 15:5, 15:7, 15:10, 15:24, 28:7 (2x), 28:8, 28:9, 28:10, 28:14, 28:15, 28:24, 28:31, 29:6, 29:11, 29:16, 29:18, 29:19, 29:21, 29:22, 29:24, 29:25, 29:27, 29:28, 29:30, 29:31, 29:33, 29:34, 29:37, 29:38, and 29:39

(2) Jeremiah – 18 appearances: 7:18 (2x), 10:14, 19:13 (2x), 32:29 (2x), 44:17 (2x), 44:18 (2x), 44:19 (4x), 44:5 (2x), and 51:17

(3) Isaiah – 8 appearances: 25:7, 29:10, 30:1, 40:19, 41:29, 44:10, and 48:5

(4) Exodus – 6 appearances: 25:29, 29:40, 29:41, 30:9 (2x), and 37:16

(5-T) Leviticus – 3 appearances: 23:13, 23:18, and 23:37

(5-T) Psalms – 3 appearances: 2:6 and 16:4 (2x)

(5-T) Ezekiel – 3 appearances: 20:28 (2x) and 45:17

(5-T) Joel – 3 appearances: 1:9, 1:13, and 2:14

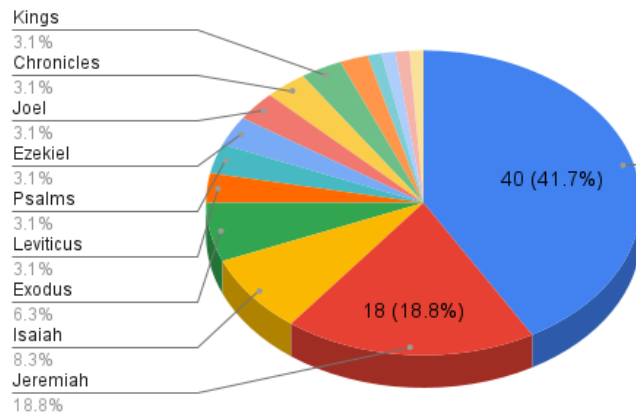
(5-T) Chronicles – 3 appearances: I 11:18, I 29:21, and II 29:35

(5-T) Kings – 3 appearances: II 16:13 (2x) and II 16:15

The only other book in the Bible with multiple appearances of libations is Genesis, with two mentions in 35:14.

There are four books in the Bible with a single appearance of libation:

- Ezra 7:17
- Samuel II 23:16
- Hoshea 9:4
- Proverbs 8:23



Amount of wine to be libated daily

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### What is to be Libated?

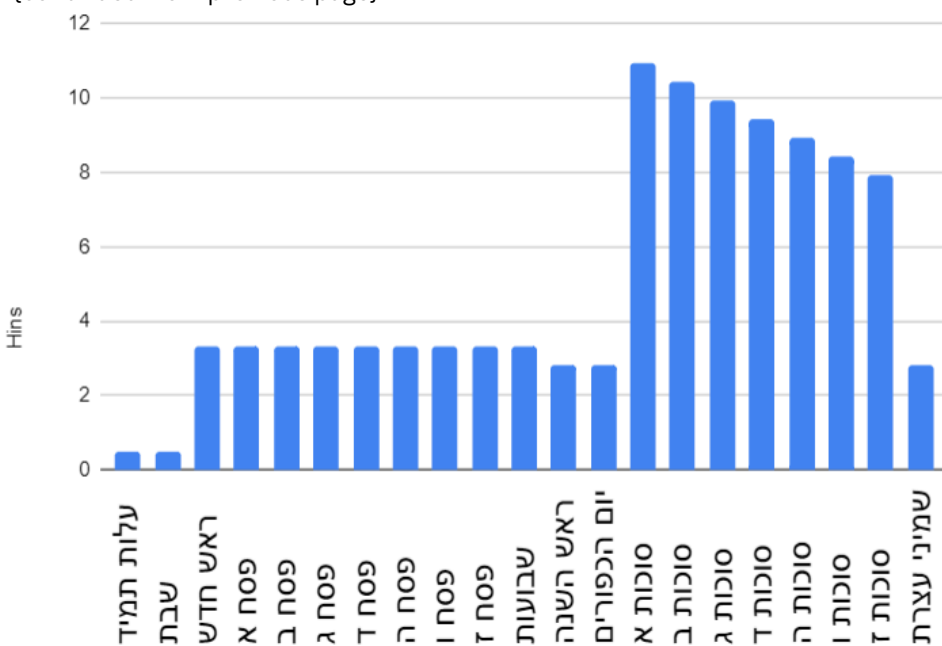
While wine is the beverage that is specified to be libated for almost all of the libations, the daily libation is described as a different beverage. For the daily offering/libation mentioned in our parshah, beer is meant to be libated for/to accompany the daily offerings (Num. 28:7), while wine is to be libated at special occasions.

On the face of it, that makes a lot of sense, as beer is more pedestrian, whereas wine attains a special status. Indeed, as Prof. Michael Homan wrote in a fascinating article, God “consumed at least half a *hin* of beer (approximately 2 liters, or a six-pack) per day through the cultic ritual of libation, and He drank even more on the Sabbath (Numbers 28:7–10)” (“Did the Ancient Israelites Drink Beer?” (*Biblical Archaeology Review* 36:5 (Sept./Oct. 2010)). It is unclear whether we’re necessarily reading of beer that is grain-based - whether wheat, barley, or other grains - or whether it is fruit-based, such as fig or date beer. While this brings up a fascinating sense of a dichotomy between the regular libation God expects of beer on a daily basis versus wine on special occasions, the rabbis sought to eliminate any possible confusion here and interpreted the beer as something that gets one drunk, thus it needs to be wine aged 40 days [which would be enough time to ferment to provide the ability to get drunk] (cf. *Sifra, Shemini* 1:1).

### Special Occasions

In addition to the daily model of offerings (Num. 28:3-8), as well as the special Shabbat offerings, which are doubled (Num. 28:9-10), we then read of three main models of quantities. The first model is that of new moons, Passover, and Shavuot, where there is to be 3.0833 *hin* to be libated in addition to the daily offerings (Num. 28:11-31), with the second model being that of Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Shemini Atzeret, that would have 2.5833 *hin* to be libated in addition to the daily offerings (Num. 29:1-11 & Num. 29:35-38).

It should be pointed out that, for both of these models, there is also a goat to be sin-offered with its accompanying libation. As there is nowhere specified in the Torah how much wine is to be libated for these



goats offered as sin-offerings, as was suggested to me on “The Libation Episode” of *The Jewish Drinking Show* by Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Zuckier, perhaps it is the same amount as that for sheep. In that case, the first model would yield 3.333 *hin* (roughly five gallons), while the second model would yield 2.5833 *hin* (almost four gallons).

The third model is totally different - that of Sukkot. While the amount of sheep and rams remains the same [as well as the goat for the sin-offering], the amount of bulls offered decreases by one each day. Thus, this yields an astonishing 10.91667 *hin* offered the first day, 10.41667 *hin* offered the second day, 9.91667 *hin* offered the third day, 9.41667 *hin* offered the fourth day, 8.91667 *hin* offered the fifth day, 8.41667 *hin* offered the sixth day, and 7.91667 *hin* offered the seventh day. These 65.91667 *hin* are equivalent to about 99 gallons(!). This massive amount of wine libated over the course of these seven days of Sukkot far surpasses that of all of the other holidays combined throughout the rest of the year, excluding new moons. Only if we were to include all of the new moons would it be close (with all of the other holidays and new moons being slightly more voluminous).

While there is a typical, steady amount to be offered on a daily basis, with a doubling for Shabbat, these other occasions call for more offerings, including more wine to be libated to God. Chief amongst them all is Sukkot, with its massive amounts of animals, offerings, and nearly 99 gallons of wine to be libated, clearly an incredibly special week.

### Conclusion

While most of us tend to give little thought of libations in the Torah (or really any offerings), our Torah portion offers us an opportunity to consider how we celebrate time, as well as provide nourishment, including wine, to The Divine. While there is a steady, double daily offering with libations, there is also a doubling for Shabbat, with a significant increase for most of our holidays. However, there is a massive increase throughout Sukkot, providing an opportunity to share our harvesting bounty with God. Not only does it appear here, but these sections also appear in our Mussaf prayers, so they regularly recur liturgically throughout the year. As we consider providing wine to God, it also offers us an opportunity to consider special times in the year for us to raise a glass.

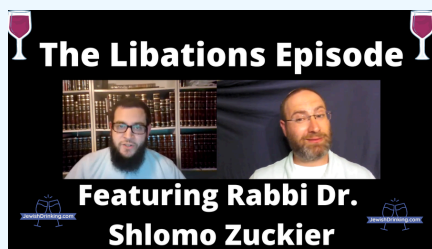
L’chaim 🍷



# The Libations Episode



For more on libations in the Torah and more, you can check out The Libations Episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, featuring Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Zuckier.



The episode is available on YouTube and wherever you prefer listening to podcasts, as well as at [JewishDrinking.com/the-libation-episode](http://JewishDrinking.com/the-libation-episode)

