

ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

סוכות - 10-11 October 2025 - Vol. 4, Iss. 50 - י"ט תשרי תשפ"ו

Sukkot is for Enjoying

When we think about holidays, we often think about the joy aspect. What we don't necessarily consider is that this joy aspect originates from the Torah's description of our relating to the specific holiday of Sukkot. The specific verses regarding joy during Sukkot are the following (Deut. 16:13-15):

After the ingathering from your threshing floor and your winepress, you shall hold the Feast of Booths for seven days. You shall rejoice in your festival, with your son and daughter, your male and female slave, the [family of the] Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your communities. You shall hold a festival for The LORD, your God, seven days, in the place that The LORD will choose; for The LORD, your God, will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy.

חג הסוכות תעשה לך
שבועת ימים באספך
מגרגך ומילקך:
ושמחת בחגך אתה
ובנך ובתך ועבדך
ואמלק ויהלוי והגר
והיתום והאלמנה
אשר בשעריך: שבעת
ימים תחגלה' אלקיך
במקום אשר יבחר ה'
כי יברכך ה' אלקיך
בכל תבואתך ובכל
מעשה ידך והיית אר
שמה

Thus it turns out that this holiday is the only one specifically described as incorporating an element of joyousness. While we can extrapolate this sense of happiness and joy to other holidays, we also should not lose sight that this holiday is explicitly characterized by joy, seemingly due to our having finished the harvest.

As anyone who has completed a project, you know how much of a relief it is to have finished and be done with it. Add into this feeling the physical aspect of a harvest and one can feel extra relieved.

Considering these verses, our sages sought to specify how the seeking out of joy is to be accomplished, resulting in - what else? - drinking (*Pesachim* 109a):

The Sages taught:

A man is obligated to gladden his children and the members of his household on a festival, as it is stated: "And you shall rejoice on your Festival" (Deut. 16:14).

With what should one make them rejoice?

With wine.

Rabbi Yehudah says: "Men with what is fit for them and women with what is fit for them."

תנו רבנן:

חייב אדם לשמח

בניו ובני ביתו ברגל

שנאמר ושמחת בחגך

במה משמחם?

בין

רבי יהודה אומר

אנשים בראוי להם

ונשים בראוי להן

As we see from this Talmudic text, the paradigmatic expression of joy to be accomplished on the festival of Sukkot - as well as other festivals - is that of wine-drinking. And even though Rabbi Yehudah disagrees with this blanket suggestion of wine, perhaps indicating wine is not everyone's interest and that there may be a gender difference occurring with wine, I imagine readers of this publication greatly appreciate that this text is part of our tradition.

{continued on page 2}

Simḥat Torah: When Liturgy & Liquor Collide

While all of our holidays have some element or aspect of drinking, perhaps none is greater than that of Simḥat Torah. The drinking on this holiday affects even the prayer services and what is typically done, owing to the amount of drinking taking place on this holiday.

For a little background, Simḥat Torah was created in the diaspora, specifically, on the second day of Shemini Atzeret. Not only is there no second day of Shemini Atzeret in Israel, but the communities in Israel many centuries ago used to read the Torah on a triennial reading cycle, whereas the Babylonian Jewish communities would read it on an annual basis (cf. the first chapter of Avraham Ya'ari's: *תולדות חג שמחת-תורה*: Jerusalem: Mosad HaRav Kook, 1964)). The Jewish communities in Babylonia carved out this second day of Shemini Atzeret to serve as the final day of the reading of the Torah and to reset their reading.

As the name implies, Simḥat Torah (Joy/Rejoicing of Torah), the festivities of the day are filled with celebrating the reading through of the Torah, whether through reading, dancing, or other activities. One of the earliest recorded mentions of the drinking parties that are to take place was written by Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340), who recorded (סור "או"ח תרסט):

And in Ashkenaz, they are accustomed that the one who completes [the Torah] and the one who begins [it again] make vows of freewill offerings, and they invite all their friends, and they make a drinking party and a celebration and a festival day for the conclusion of the Torah and for its beginning.

ונוהגין באשכנז
שהמסיים והמתחיל
נודרין נדבות וקוראין
לכל מרעיהן ועושין
משתה ושמחה וי"ט
לסיומה של תורה
ולתחלתה

This day on the final day of the holiday season is a day for drinking-parties to take place, as part of celebrating both the concluding of the {continued on page 3}

Today we will be dancing with our precious, holy and HEAVY Torah Scrolls. It is vitally important nobody drop one!



Oneg Shabbas explores drinking in the weekly Torah portion, along with timely essays on drinking in Jewish life
An archive of all issues is available at JewishDrinking.com/Parashah-Sheets

{Sukkot, continued from previous page}

Moreover, this fulfillment of rejoicing on holidays as being accomplished through wine-drinking was ratified, as it was included in subsequent halakhic works, such as Maimonides' *Mishneh Torah* (הלכות שביית יום טוב) and Rabbi Yosef Caro's *Shulhan Arukh* (OH 529:1). Indeed, Maimonides (1138-1204) specifies that this wine-drinking on festivals fulfills a mitzvah, as he describes (ספר המצוות, מצוות עשה נ"ד):

Included in the ways of "You shall rejoice on your festival" are to rejoice upon them with joyful activities such as eating meat, drinking wine, wearing new clothes, distributing fruits, and a variety of sweets to children and women, as well as playing with musical instruments and dancing only in the Temple, which is at the water-drawing house. All of this fits into what they said about "You shall rejoice in your festival". What they obligated from them more than any of the others is wine-drinking specifically, since it is more uniquely associated with joy.

ובכלל אמרו ושמחת בחגך מה שאמרו גם כן לשמוח בם במיני שמחה ומזה לאכול בשר ולשתות יין וללבוש בגדים חדשים ולחלק מיני פירות ומיני מתיקה לקטנים ולנשים. ולשחוק בכל ניגון ולרקוד במקדש לבד והיא שמחת בית השואבה, זה כולו נכנס באמרו ושמחת בחגך. ומה שיתחייב מהם יותר שתיית היין לבד, כי הוא יותר מיוחד בשמחה



Thus, having a great time through drinking on holidays - Sukkot, especially - is not only a great way of enjoying them, it seems to be a fundamental aspect of them.

L'chaim 🍷

Whereas with most holidays the total amount of wine we are to libate to God on any given day is usually within the range of 2.8333 *hins* (Rosh HaShanah, Yom Kippur, and Shemini Atzeret) and 3.333 *hins* (Shavuot, each day of Pessah, and Rosh Hodesh), the smallest amount of *hins* we are to libate is about 8 *hins* on the final day of Sukkot. When we consider that a *hin* is about a gallon and a half, this is a lot of wine to libate to God!

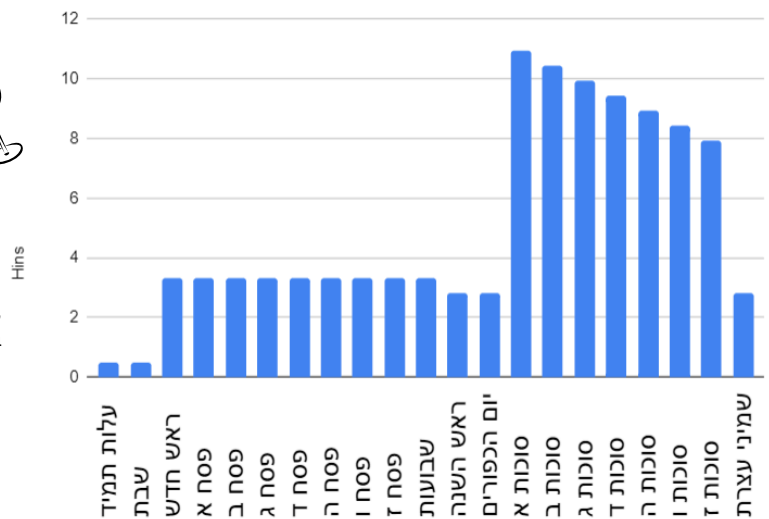
While on a daily basis, the amount on any given day of Sukkot far surpasses any other single day outside of the holiday of Sukkot regarding volume of wine to libate to God. This strikingly massive amount becomes all the much more so when we begin to consider how much the total amount is to be libated to God during this time, yielding an absolutely staggering amount.

In fact, when we add up how much is to be libated to God during these seven days, it totals up to be over 100 gallons of wine to be provided to God. When one considers that a non-holiday month of 29 days would typically demand around 29.75 gallons of wine, that means the amount of wine libated during these seven days is more than three non-holiday months (see below for a graphic contrasting a regular month vs. Sukkot).

Lots of Libations on Sukkot

While in this space, when we talk about Jewish drinking, we usually discuss human consumption. And while we are definitely thinking about human consumption on this holiday (see column to the left), another drinking aspect that stands out is that of Divine consumption. As it turns out, Sukkot is the holiday where we are to provide the most amount of libations to God contrasted against any other time of the year. And it's not even close.

Libations (according to Numbers 28-29)



As to where all of this wine is coming from, it may simply be due to this time of year being the wine harvest. This bounty of grapes/wine could have been harvested early on in the season, then begin fermenting, ultimately becoming ready for all of this libating for Sukkot. Indeed, as Prof. Jeffrey Rubenstein pointed out:

Since grapes only ripened in August and September, there was little opportunity prior to Sukkot to bring firstfruits of grapes or wine. Peasants were preoccupied with the arduous vintage labors in any case. After the vintage, on Sukkot, when the farmers made their way to Jerusalem for the festival, it was the perfect time to bring a firstfruit offering of new wine as well.

("The Sukkot Wine Libation", in *Ki Baruch Hu: Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Judaic Studies in Honor of Baruch A. Levine*, eds. Robert Chazan, William W. Hallo, & Lawrence H. Schiffman (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 590)

In this way, this way of bringing these first-fruits of grapes would be an excellent way of both providing appreciation to God for such bountiful harvest, as well as a way to celebrate on a national scale all of these grapes, which, as readers of this publication may well know are clearly meant for wine purposes. Moreover, it seems that there was a very joyous atmosphere when coming together during this time, as Prof. Rubenstein also connects the celebration of the water-drawing ceremony that is mentioned in the Mishnah (*Sukkah* 5:1):

אָמרו, כָּל מִי שֶׁלֹּא רָאָה
rejoicing of the Drawing House has
never seen rejoicing in their lives." שְׂמֵחַת בֵּית הַשּׁוֹאֵבָה,
לא רָאָה שְׂמֵחָה מִמֵּינוּ

About this, he writes (ibid.):

The dancing, singing, joy, and general gaiety that the Mishnah associates with this nocturnal ritual are perfectly understandable as repercussions of rejoicing with wine.

Moreover, he continues:

And the elation at the completed autumn harvest and vintage helps to explain the emphasis on festal joy. But wine, as divine gift, the drink that "gladdens God and men," bears a special association with joy and *simha*. Against this background, the exhortation to be *ak sameah* 'to have nothing but joy' (Deut 16:16) is fully understandable.

May we be inspired to enjoy our bountifulness of wine at this time 🍷😊

L'chaim 🍷



Oneg Shabbas is composed by, edited by, and published by Rabbi Drew Kaplan.

If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, he may be reached at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

{Simḥat Torah continued from page 1}

reading of the Torah, as well as its restarting. We read later of Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530-1572), who wrote (הגה לשו"ע או"ח תרס"ט א):

The last day of Yom Tov is called "The Rejoicing of the Torah" because we rejoice on it, making a festive meal of drinking in honor of the finishing of the Torah. It is customary for the person who finishes the Torah and the one who starts Genesis to make a donation and invite everybody to a drinking party.	וקורין י"ט האחרון שמחת תורה לפי ששמחין ועושין בו סעודת משתה לגמרה של תורה ונוהגין שהמסיים התורה והמתחיל בראשית נודרים נדבות וקוראים לאחרים לעשות משתה
--	---



Clearly, this is a very joyous day, as well as one filled with drinking. As such, there does arise one noticeable challenge that occurs on account of all of this drinking.

Perhaps the most well-known challenges of the day when it comes to prayer services is the ritual of ברכת הכהנים the priestly blessing. While this activity takes place on a daily basis in Israel, Ashkenazi communities customarily have it only taking place at Mussaf on holidays (Sefardic communities have a different practice). Since kiddush is typically conducted by those who have been called up to the Torah following Shaḥarit and drinking ensues, this generates a quandary, regarding kohanim (priests) and their consumption. While readers may want to check out the 161st episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* published in 2024 regarding a variety of rabbinic opinions on how much alcohol kohanim are permitted to drink prior to providing the priestly blessing, there are some opinions that kohanim should not be under the influence while providing it. Thus, what should be done with this blessing?

Apparently, three different approaches were taken to respond to providing the priestly blessing on Simḥat Torah, since drinking takes place prior to Mussaf. Rabbi Mordekhai ben Avraham Yaffe (1530-1612) advocated doing away with this blessing altogether in the diaspora (לבוש או"ח תרס"ט):

We are not accustomed to [have the kohanim] ascend [on Simḥat Torah] to provide the priestly blessing, since the nation is so busy with their rejoicing that drunkenness is common.	ואין נוהגין לעלות לדוכן מפני שמחת העם שטרדין בשמחתן ושכיחי שכרות
---	--



Of course, this is a reasonable suggestion, since this avoids the problem of drunken priestly blessing, but it also makes it so that it is not even an option to be provided.

Instead of doing entirely away with this blessing, commenting on this text, Rabbi Eliyahu Spira (1660-1712) strove for two alternative options, seeking to still allow for the priestly blessing to be provided (אליה רבה או"ח (תרס"ט):

Here in Prague, we are accustomed to have the kohanim ascend to provide the priestly blessing at Mussaf. It's only in Pinḥas' shul that they ascend in the morning service, as written in the books of customs.	פה פראג נוהגים לעלות במוסף רק בבית הכנסת פנחס נוהגים בשחרית כמו שכתבו המנהגים
---	---



Similar to Rabbi Yaffe, Rabbi Yehiel Michel ha-Levi Epstein (1829-1908) wrote (ערוך השולחן, אורח חיים תרס"ט ג):

Kohanim do not ascend to provide the priestly blessing, since they normally will be drinking wine or whiskey after reading the Torah.	...ואין עולין לדוכן, מפני שרגילין לשתות יין ויין שרוף אחר קריאת ספר תורה.....
---	---



However, not being satisfied with simply dismissing this opportunity, a kohen, Rabbi Yisrael Meir ha-Kohen Kagan (1838-1933) mentions all three of these practices, quoting both Rabbi Spira and Rabbi Yaffe, and then concludes (משנה ברורה תרס"ט:י"ז):

And every place should practice according to their custom, as long as they are careful to have the kohanim ascend to provide the priestly blessing prior to drinking.	וכל מקום לפי מנהגו ויזהרו שלא ישנו
---	------------------------------------

In an insightful article on this topic, Rabbi Akiva Males provided further insights into these possibilities ("Friends Don't Let Friends Drink and *Dukhen: Birkat Kohanim and Simhat Torah in the Diaspora*", *Tradition* 49.2 (Summer 2016), 60-62):

Custom 1: As we have seen, R. Moses Isserles staunchly defended the longstanding Ashkenazic custom of restricting *Birkat Kohanim* throughout the year to Musaf on the holidays alone. His explanation of this custom was based on the integral role that a true state of happiness plays in *Birkat Kohanim*. The need for happiness is so great that *Birkat Kohanim* simply cannot take place when that state cannot be fully felt. According to R. Isserles, such a state can only be achieved at the Musaf service during the holidays. Accordingly, the same limitations which apply to *Birkat Kohanim* during any other holiday apply on *Simhat Torah* as well. Therefore, *Birkat Kohanim* can only take place during Musaf and at no other point – on *Simhat Torah*. Engaging in *Birkat Kohanim* at that time, however, needs to be carefully supervised to ensure that no Kohanim who have imbibed intoxicating beverages bless the congregation.

Custom 2: While fully agreeing with the need to limit *Birkat Kohanim* to the narrow window of Musaf during the holidays, some communities realized this would cause serious challenges on *Simhat Torah*. Having completed a full year's worth of weekly Torah readings, people would feel a strong urge to celebrate the occasion by toasting one another. In the midst of such a celebratory atmosphere, it would be too difficult to control which Kohanim remained eligible to bless the congregation and which ones needed to refrain from doing so based on how many toasts they had enjoyed.

Such locales were left with just two options: A) completely omitting *Birkat Kohanim* on *Simhat Torah*, and B) moving *Birkat Kohanim* from Musaf to Shaḥarit on that day.

Many of those communities did not consider cancelling *Birkat Kohanim* on *Simhat Torah* to be an option. After all, with so few opportunities for Kohanim to bless the congregations of Ashkenazic lands, Simhat Torah was a precious opportunity to receive those blessings. As such, many congregations hoped to find a way to make that happen. Not willing to lose out on *Birkat Kohanim*, they took the bold step of moving *Birkat Kohanim* to Shaḥarit on *Simhat Torah*. By moving those blessings to a point in the service which preceded the Torah reading – and celebratory toasts – they ensured that all of their Kohanim were in fact eligible to participate in *Birkat Kohanim*.

How did those communities justify this break from the classic Ashkenazic custom which limited *Birkat Kohanim* to the Musaf service of the holidays alone? It is possible to say that their thought process was similar to the above-cited observation of the *Arukh ha-Shulhan* (O.H. 128:64):

Behold, there is certainly no proper explanation of our custom to neglect the Biblical precepts of *Birkat Kohanim* all year long... However, what can we do? It is as if a heavenly voice called out and will not allow us to engage in *Birkat Kohanim* throughout the year...

In the view of those communities, the ultimate reason behind this Ashkenazic custom to limit *Birkat Kohanim* to Musaf during the holidays alone was never fully clear. As such, some

{continued on page 4}

{Simhat Torah continued from page 3}

communities recognized they could not engage in *Birkat Kohanim* during Musaf on *Simhat Torah* since there would be no way to properly monitor which Kohanim should bless the congregation. At the same time, they were not prepared to omit *Birkat Kohanim* altogether on that day. As such, those communities felt justified in taking the bold step of moving *Birkat Kohanim* from Musaf to Shaharit on *Simhat Torah*.

Custom 3: Now it is easy to understand how a third custom – that of omitting *Birkat Kohanim* altogether on *Simhat Torah* – developed. This custom adheres most closely to the ancient Ashkenazic custom which R. Isserles detested. As R. Isserles explained, *Birkat Kohanim* can only be recited when the Kohanim are in an absolute state of happiness. In the Diaspora, such a level of joy can only be achieved during Musaf on the holidays. As such, there were simply no other times of the year when Ashkenazim living outside the land of Israel could honestly experience such happiness.

Since allowing *Birkat Kohanim* during Musaf on *Simhat Torah* was highly problematic, and moving those blessings to *Shaharit* was simply not an option for some communities, there remained no way for Kohanim to recite the priestly blessings in those locales. As such, for those who felt compelled to take R. Isserles' explanation of a perplexing but longstanding Ashkenazic custom seriously, no option for performing *Birkat Kohanim* on *Simhat Torah* in the Diaspora remained. Hence, odd as it sounds, in some Ashkenazic communities – outside the Land of Israel – the custom developed to completely omit the priestly blessings on *Simhat Torah*.

Whichever of these three practices you see taking place, this is hopefully a helpful laying out of options.

Havdallah in the Sukkah?

A question this time of year is "Does one have to do do havdallah in a sukkah?" This is certainly a good Jewish drinking question. As discussed in episode #142 of *The Jewish Drinking Show* (JewishDrinking.com/SukkotDrinking), once one has a set drinking session, especially when drinking enough wine for havdallah, that might necessitate drinking within a sukkah (but it is certainly a matter of rabbinic debate).



While it had not been mandated by the *Shulhan Arukh*, Rabbi David HaLevi Segal (1586-1667) wrote (*Taz* OH 639:14):

Throughout the year, Havdallah is made
בבית שכל השנה
בבית צריך
מבדיל בבית צריך
to make havdallah within one's sukkah.
להבדיל בסוכה

Subsequent to Rabbi Segal, Rabbi Yosef ben Meir Teomim (1727-1792) wrote, albeit less forcefully, that the custom is to make havdallah in the sukkah (Pri Megadim, MZ 639:14). Later on, Rabbi Yisrael Meir ha-Kohen Kagan (1838-1933) wrote similarly to Rabbi Segal (*Mishnah Berurah* 639:30):

One makes havdallah in the sukkah,
since we make havdallah year-round
in our house

מבדיל בסוכה
שכן כל השנה
מבדיל בביתו

As such, it is certainly a fitting drinking activity to take place in the sukkah.

L'chaim

Transitional Drinking

Another challenge is that drinking is not relegated only to the day of *Simhat Torah*, but even the night, transitioning from *Shemini Atzeret*, as Rabbi Kagan wrote (משנה ברורה תרס"ח:ז):

Regarding the practice of those in certain places, that, after minḥah on the first day of *Shemini Atzeret*, they set themselves to drink until ma'ariv. And sometimes, they continue this activity until an hour or so into the night, not in accordance with the proper practice, on account of many reasons. The first of which is as we have read in §99 that if one drank a quarter-log of wine, one should not pray, even if one is still able to speak in front of The King. And this is also the case if one drank other intoxicating beverages; see there in §99:1.

And even if one drank non-intoxicating beverages, once it reaches the time of possible darkness, then one needs to make Kiddush, and it is forbidden to taste anything until they make Kiddush. And even after Kiddush, behold, it holds them back from eating on account of Shema-reading of the evening. And the only tasting that is permitted is simply a taste, such as types of fruits or an egg's-worth of bread, but no further. Indeed, one should seek out merit on their behalf, to remind them so they should not forget the evening prayer.

But, in any event, one should be careful not to drink intoxicating beverages. And everything is explained above, in §99:1-2.

Rabbi Kagan takes issue with this practice he was witnessing over a century ago with this practice of drinking during the transition from *Shemini Atzeret* to *Simhat Torah*, criticizing the custom in some places where people drink heavily after the first day's minḥah until nightfall, sometimes even into the night. He points out that this practice is improper because drinking can disqualify one from praying *ma'ariv* properly, and once it's near sundown, one is already obligated in *kiddush* and restricted from further drinking or eating beyond small amounts. As far as the praying under the influence goes, he references Rabbi Yosef Karo's *Shulhan Arukh*.

While Rabbi Karo (1488-1575) did, record in his work to not pray if one had consumed a few ounces of wine, he then cites the Talmudic standard of still being able to pray as long as one is able to speak before The King. Rabbi Kagan does not like that allowance. Fortunately, he then moves on to another issue: that of kiddush. Indeed, one needs to make kiddush when it gets dark. While there is not much to work in their favor, especially since kiddush is meant to take place where the meal will be occurring, he kindly advised readers to seek out merit on the behalf of those who continue to drink during this time without having made kiddush. While he concludes with dissuading anyone from drinking intoxicating beverages at this time, one also senses that he is suggesting that as a best practice, even if it will not be followed.

However you celebrate *Shemini Atzeret* and *Simhat Torah*, I wish you a *ḥag sameah!*

L'chaim

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.
Tax-deductible donations made be contributed at JewishDrinking.com/Donate

