

ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

פרשת משפטים - 13-14 February 2026 - Volume 5, Issue 18 - כ"ז שבט תשפ"ו

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

Drinking in the Divine

A curious Biblical drinking story occurs towards the end of this week's Torah portion (Ex. 24:9-11):

And Moses, Aaron, Nadav, and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel ascended; and they saw the God of Israel—under whose feet was the likeness of a pavement of sapphire, like the very sky for purity. Yet [God] did not raise a hand against the leaders of the Israelites; they beheld God, and they ate and **drink**.

ויעל משה ואהרן נדב
ואביהוא ושבעים מזקני
ישראל: ויראו את אלקי
ישראל ותחת רגליו
כמעשה לבנת הספיר
וכעצם השמים לטהר:
ואל אצילי בני ישראל לא
שלח ידו ויחזו את האלקים
ויאכלו וישתו!

Wow! While seeing God should be remarkable enough, having this visual depiction of what lay beneath God's feet is further astounding. Yet, perhaps due to how fantastic that description is, the drinking that follows seems to get lost in our readings of this scene. As one person with whom I am connected on Facebook remarked last year: "What does it mean that they saw God and they ate and drank? This seems to be a very difficult (and often forgotten) passage?"

Eating and Drinking?

Setting aside the question as to "what does it mean that they saw God?", as that deserves its own treatment, the question about "what does it mean that they ate and drank?" actually is quite fascinating, as we do not typically read of divine encounters with an accompaniment of a meal, whether subsequently or simultaneously occurring to seeing God. Indeed, we read of two differing opinions within Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki's (1040-1105) commentary on this (ד"ה ויחזו את האלהים):

They gazed at God with a coarse attitude through [simply] eating and drinking, such is the incident described in *Midrash Tanhuma*, but Onkelos did not translate it that way.

היו מסתכלין בו בלב
גס מתוך אכילה
ושתייה, כך מדרש
תנחומא, ואנקלוס
לא תרגם כן

As to how this incident is described in *Midrash Tanhuma*, it is the following (מדרש תנחומא, בהעלותך ט"ז:א):

Was there [actually] eating and drinking there? To what is the matter comparable? To a servant who attended his master while [holding] a slice of bread in his hand and taking bites from it. Similarly, had they acted with disrespect as if they had been eating and drinking. So the elders along with Nadav and Avihu deserved to be destroyed by fire on that day; but because the giving of Torah was dear to the Holy One, blessed be He, He therefore did not want to harm them and bring calamity to them on that day. This is what is written, "But He (the Holy One, blessed be He,) did not raise His hand against the nobles of the Children of Israel" (Ex. 24:11). From this [description], you may infer that they deserved to have a hand raised [against them].

וכי אכילה ושתייה היה
שם. משל למה הדבר
דומה, לעבד שהיה
משמר את רבו ופרסותו
בידו והוא נושך ממנו, כך
הקלו את ראשם
כאוכלים ושותים. והיו
ראוי לישרף באותה
שעה הזקנים ונדב
ואביהו. ומפני שהיה מתן
תורה חביב לפני הקדוש
ברוך הוא, לפיכך לא
רצה הקדוש ברוך הוא
לפגע בהם בו ביום
לעשות פרוצה בהם, הדא
הוא דכתיב: ואל אצילי
בני ישראל לא שלח ידו
(שם), מכלל שהיו ראויים
להשתלח ידו

{continued on page 2}

Who Is to Drink on Purim?

Following-up from last week's discussion of When to drink on Purim, a further matter to consider is Who is supposed to drink on Purim?

When we consider the phrasing of the original statement by Rava (280-352), the "who" is to drink seems to be a person, although potentially a man (*Megillah* 7b):



Rava said: "A person is obligated to become intoxicated on Purim until one does not know the difference between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai."

אמר רבא: מיחייב
איניש לבסומי
בפוריא עד דלא ידע
בין ארור המן לברוך
מורדכי

We later read that this statement is repeated verbatim by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) in his *Shulhan Arukh* (OH §695:2). But is getting drunk on Purim really for everyone?

While this term literally means a human being, it seems reasonable to understand it meaning within this context to be speaking of Jews. But is this really to mean all Jews? Could it mean men, but not boys? Could it mean men, but not women? Seemingly, these distinctions seem to be absent from writings on this matter throughout halakhic history (unless they do, indeed, exist and I have yet to encounter them).

Are Women Included?

Does איניש also include women? Perhaps, although there does not seem to be [much/any] pre-20th century rabbinic writings on the matter, as Rabbanit Debbie Zimmerman has pointed out, this is a rather recent phenomenon ("Purim - Women and Alcohol", *Matan* (Adar 5579/March 2019)):



In the last century or so, several prominent *poskim* (rabbinic decisors) have questioned whether women are included in this obligation.

For example, Rav Vosner rules that a woman is not obligated to get drunk based on a *gemara* in *Ketubot* that warns that too much wine causes women to behave lewdly....

Similarly, Rav Shternbuch rules that women are not obligated because they do not regularly get drunk and drunkenness could lead to serious sins. ...



While some may balk at a double standard for man and women, it is inappropriate to dismiss opinions of such *poskim* without a second thought. In this case, it seems reasonable to entertain the possibility that this distinction between men and women is at least partially based on physiological differences that still exist today. There are a plethora of studies indicating that women have a lower alcohol tolerance than men - meaning that the average woman gets drunk twice as fast as the average man, and overindulgence can pose a more significant threat to women's health. Additionally, it would be irresponsible to ignore the fact that inebriation makes a person even more vulnerable than usual, so a woman who chooses to drink on Purim should be careful to do so in a safe environment.



Indeed, there seem to be numerous 20th century Haredi halakhic decisors who articulated that women are not obligated within this category (Rabbi Ephraim Greenblatt (1932-2014)'s *Rivevos Ephraim* 1:458, 4:173:10, 53, {continued on page 3})

{Drinking in the Divine, continued from page 1}

According to this midrash, they acted in a disrespectful manner as if they had been eating and drinking, yet, seemingly, this midrash is not content with them actually having eaten and drank at this point. Yet, Rashi seemed to have understood that they had ate and drank, albeit in a coarse fashion. Here is the translation by Onkelos (35–120 CE) that Rashi mentioned (תרגום אונקלוס על שמות כ"ד:י"א):

But against the nobility of the Israelites, He [God] did not send His hand [there was no damage]. They envisioned [saw the Glory of] God, and they [rejoiced in their sacrifices which were accepted graciously as if they] ate and drank.

These two positions that Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki mention conflict in two different ways: (1) whether there was actually eating and drinking there or not, and (2) whether their behavior was appropriate to the situation or not. While Rashi mentions that these leaders gazed at God with a coarse attitude, where does he derive this notion?

Further Negative Midrashic Viewpoints

What we saw above from Midrash Tanhuma is not the only midrashic treatment of this story, as we read the following (ויקרא רבה כ"י):

Rabbi Pinhas said: "From here [it may be derived] that they were deserving of the hand being extended, as Rabbi Hoshayah said: 'Did cakes go up with them to Sinai, that it states: "They beheld God [and ate and drank]"? (Exodus 24:11). Rather, it teaches that they feasted their eyes on the Divine Presence. "They beheld God" like a person who looks at his friend while eating and drinking." Rabbi Yoḥanan said: "Actual eating, just as it says: 'Life is in the light of the king's countenance' (Proverbs 16:15)." Rabbi Tanhuma says: "It teaches that they exposed their heads, acted with arrogance, and feasted their eyes on the Divine Presence."

אמר רבי פנחס מכאן שהיו ראויין להשלחת יד, דאמר רבי הושעיה וכי קילורין עלת עמיהו מסיני דאת אמר (שמות כד, יא): ויחזו את האלהים, אלא מלמד שזגו עיניהם מן השכינה, ויחזו את האלהים, כאדם שמביט בחברו מתוך מאכל ומשתה. רבי יוחנן אמר אכילה ודיא, כמה דאת אמר (משלי טז, טו): באור פני מלך חיים, אמר רבי תנחומא מלמד שפרעו את ראשיהו וגיסו לבם וזגו עיניהם מן השכינה.

The only opinion amongst this trio that considers these leaders' eating as such is Rabbi Yoḥanan and, we can also imagine, that would also include drinking (unless he considers them to be two entirely separate matters for the purposes of this conversation). Aside from that, both Rabbi Tanhuma and Rabbi Hoshaya (as quoted by Rabbi Pinhas) argue that these leaders did not eat actual food, instead deriving sustenance from viewing the Divine Presence. Moreover, Rabbi Hoshayah explicitly questions the likelihood that they brought up food with them up the mountain.

While Rabbi Hoshaya and Rabbi Yoḥanan do not position these leaders' actions in a negative light, Rabbi Tanhuma, however, does, as he describes them as not only exposing their heads, which is already a matter of lessening respect, but also acting with arrogance. This opinion also seems to have influenced Rashi's description of these leaders' behavior.



What Did They Eat and Drink?

While there is no specification as to what they ate nor what they drank, many commentators connected their consumption with the peace-offerings made in Exodus 24:5, such as Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (1085-1158) and Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) (רשב"ם על שמות (כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה ויאכלו וישתו ואבן עזרא על שמות כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה ויאכלו (כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה ויאכלו וישתו). This would mean that they would have taken it with them as provisions along their journey to encounter the Divine. As to what they drank, one might have expected the commentators to perhaps mention connecting wine to libations, although I have not come across any who wrote such a suggestion. This leaves us with the likelihood that these leaders drank wine and/or water.

However, what is striking about reading Rabbi ibn Ezra's comments on this verse is that when he describes the drinking, he mentions that they descended happily from the mountain. Based off of these comments, it would seem that this is alluding to wine, since no one becomes happy off of drinking water.

Description of Happiness

One answer as to why they were drinking was simply that they were happy. Rabbi ibn Ezra, described them as being happy (אבן עזרא על שמות) and Rabbi Yoseph ben Yitzhak Bekhor Shor of Orléans (12th century), who described them as being happy (שמחים הרבה "Very happy" (בכור שור, שמות כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה ואל אצילי בני ישראל) :



When the Holy One appeared to them, they were very fearful, lest they be harmed, as Manoah said: "We shall surely die, for we have seen God" (Judges 13:22). But when they saw that He did not stretch out His hand against them and they were not harmed, they received the Divine Presence without injury. "And they ate and drank" because they were exceedingly joyful.

כשנגלה להם הק' היו יראים מאד פן יזוקו כמו שאמר מנוח מות נמות כי אלהים ראינו וכשראו שלא שלח עליהם ידו ולא הזיקו הקבילו פני שכינה בלא הזיק ויאכלו וישתו כי היו שמחים הרבה:

This being very joyful seems to be as a result of having survived a situation where they would otherwise have perished. While this eating and drinking may have occurred while they saw God, it may have taken place afterwards, in celebration of remaining alive.

Not Actually Eating & Drinking in Front of God?

One Jewish thinker who was not pleased with this behavior was none other than Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138-1204) (popularly known as Rambam, as well as Maimonides), who wrote (Guide for the Perplexed Part I, ch. 5 (Goodman & Lieberman translation, with adjustments (pp. 27-28))):

The "elite of Israel" (Exodus 24:11) were hasty and strained their minds. They did perceive, but imperfectly. So it says, "They saw the God of Israel, and under His feet" (24:10) - not simply "They saw the God of Israel". The words do not describe, but criticize, their vision for being so corporeal, since they rushed ahead when not fully prepared. They deserved to perish, but Moses pled for them. So they were spared - until they were burnt at Taberah (Numbers 11:1-3), as were Nadav and Avihu in the Tent of Assembly (Leviticus 10:1-3), as our sound tradition relates.

... Israel's nobles, I say, suffered not just a cognitive, but a practical lapse, turning toward the corporeal, since their awareness was sullied, as it says, "They beheld God, and they ate and drank" (Exodus 24:11). ... My point here is simply that whenever "seeing", "looking", or "vision" is used in this way, it means intellectual, not visual, apprehension, for God is not visible.

{continued on page 3}

{*Drinking in the Divine*, continued from page 2}

Maimonides' criticism of the behavior of these leaders is not just their eating and drinking, although it includes that, but also perceiving God corporeally. This is on account of their not being properly prepared to perceive God, which is how Maimonides perceives them as having been deserving of death from God, which is delayed by Moses through his pleading on their behalf. As to their eating and drinking, he also is quite critical, once again owing to their very physical needs, which he seems bothered by, on account of this incredible spiritual opportunity, yet they got down to this very physical activity.

Spiritual State of These Leaders

His son, Rabbi Avraham, son of Moses (1186-1237) considered the spiritual state of these leaders, considering two different possibilities (ר' אברהם בן הרמב"ם שמות כ"ד:י"א):

This may either be referring to the nobles, meaning that they remained, up until that moment, on the same level as others who eat and drink, without having undergone a major transformation. They engaged with the flesh of the peace offerings, whose blood and fat had been offered initially. It is as if this hints at the Aramaic translation: "And they rejoiced with the sacrifices that were accepted, as if they ate and drank." Thus, they were placed on the same level as the "youths of the children of Israel," or perhaps they themselves were the ones being referred to.

Alternatively, the phrase "And they ate and drank" may refer to all of them – the nobles and the holy assembly – each according to their respective levels. This hints that they were all, may peace be upon them, in that state of seclusion that took place on the blessed mountain, fully devoted to Him, the Exalted, until they achieved completion in their closeness to Him and their service to Him, each one according to his own portion. Necessarily, their state at that moment was one that was close to preventing them from partaking in a meal, and thus, when that experience concluded, they then took some food and drink.

In these two possibilities that he considers, the first of these is one where these leaders actually did eat, consuming sacrifices while up on the mountain and viewing God, with the second possibility being one of being in a special spiritual state, preventing them from eating at that time, waiting to eat and drink only until after their experience of viewing God.

A Sense of Achievement?

Perhaps beyond simply being happy of having survived this ordeal, as described earlier by Rabbi ibn Ezra and Rabbi Bekhor Shor, an intriguing description of the motivation of these leaders' drinking is described by Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1549), who wrote (שמות על שמות) ספורנו (כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה ויאכלו וישתו):

{continued on page 4}

{Who Drinks on Purim?, continued from page 1}

Mekadesh Yisroel Purim 334, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch (1926-)'s *Moadim V'zemanim* 2:190, Rabbi Gavriel Zinner's *Nitei Gavriel Purim* 73:4, Rabbi Shmuel HaLevi Wosner (1913-2015)'s *Shevet HaLevi* 10:18:2, and *Shulhan Arukh Hamekutzar* 123, n. 19 (Credit goes to Rabbi Moishe Dovid Lebovits for compiling this list ("Drinking on Purim", *Halakhically Speaking* 10:3 (2014), 12, n. 7)).

However, while women seem to be halakhically exempt from getting drunk on Purim, that does not mean that it is necessarily inappropriate for them to get drunk on Purim. For more on this topic, see the 172nd episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, featuring Rabbanit Zimmerman in conversation with Rabbi Drew Kaplan about these considerations.

What About Those Who are Not Yet Men?

While we read of Jewesses being exempted from getting drunk on Purim, what about males under a certain age? In recent decades, there have been dozens of publications in the Jewish world advocating not only against, but quite strongly and harshly against teenagers drinking, whether in general, or on Purim, in particular.

In America, usually a large focus of attention in popular discourse is against underage drinking, which would be anyone under the age of 21, as that is the current minimum legal age for the purchasing of alcohol in this country. I suspect the discourse in any country is largely going to follow along the lines of minimum legal age, although another variable to consider are the varying cultural norms from one country to another.

While underage drinking, in general, and Purim, in particular, continues to occur, whether only in small numbers or otherwise, it is certainly concerning. According to various 20th century Haredi halakhic decisors, children are not included in Purim-drinking (*Moadim V'zemanim* 2:190, *Teshuvos V'hanhagos* 3:229, and *Nitei Gavriel Purim* 73:4, n. 10 (Credit for this list goes once again to Rabbi Lebovits (*Ibid.*, 13, n. 79))).

Furthermore, there are many, many dangers associated with under-age drinking, as can be seen from the deeply unfortunate number of teenagers who end up in hospitals on Purim.

Further Demographic Consideration

These considerations concerning demographics also make me think about another aspect of drinking. As Rava was arguably the Talmud's most notable wine-drinker, one wonders if he was used to having others around him who also were experienced drinkers, and perhaps even finding themselves happily inebriated on occasion. If so, perhaps he made his statement in the sense of "If you're going to drink and get drunk on any number of occasions throughout the year, make sure to do so on Purim." That way, one demonstrates that it is certainly the drinkingest day par excellence on the Jewish calendar and full of merriment. However, perhaps, for those not accustomed to drinking, much less getting drunk, perhaps the obligation to get drunk is certainly less necessary.

Conclusion

While the language used both by Rava in the Talmud, as well as in subsequent halakhic literature, including Rabbi Karo in his *Shulhan Arukh*, seems to be broadly inclusive of people to get drunk on Purim, it seems inappropriate for underage people (particularly teenagers) to drink, whereas women are exempted from this inclusion. While this seems to limit the drinking to men, one also wonders about those who are not used to getting drunk. Certainly, however, for those used to drinking and/or getting drunk, Purim is a wondrously festive and very appropriate day for doing so.

L'chaim 

{Drinking in the Divine, continued from page 3}

Afterwards, they made a drinking-party עשו משתה אחרי
without their normal senses having been in בלתי השתנות
any way transformed or temporarily בחושיהם, וזה עשו
neutralized. They made this party upon לשמחה על מה
what they had achieved. שהשיגו

Although it is unclear if Rabbi Sforno's comment here is meant to criticize these leaders for not having been transformed or not, he does seem to perceive their drinking-party as having taken place *after* their having perceived God. This is similar to what Rabbi Avraham, son of Moses, wrote, although Rabbi Sforno's view on the matter is that these leaders were not changed in any way following this very special experience. From his words, it would seem that their drinking-party to celebrate might have been on account of their having survived, but also possibly in celebration of having had such a special experience viewing God.

Not on Moshe's Level

Speaking of spiritual levels, a not uncommon theme amongst many commentators is that the direct divine experience does not occur that much, yet this juxtaposition of seeing God and consumption is shown in clear contrast to Moshe's abstaining from food and drink for 40 days, as described in Exodus 34:28. Indeed, this is articulated by Rabbi ibn Ezra quoting Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi (1075-1141) (ד"ה) אבן עזרא על שמות כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה) (וישטו):

Rabbi Judah Ha-Levi said that the meaning of "and did eat" is, they had to eat even though they enjoyed the splendor of God's presence. Scripture mentions this because Moses lived for forty days and forty nights without eating and drinking, as is noted in the next section.	ורבי יהודה הלוי אמר כי טעם ויאכלו. כי הוצרכו שיאכלו אע"פ שנהנו מזיו השכינה. והזכיר זה בעבור משה שחיה ארבעים יום וארבעים לילה בלא אכילה וכתוב בפ' אחרי זאת
---	---

Rabbi HaLevi's take on their need to eat and drink is simply a need, despite their enjoying the Divine Presence. Indeed, it did not seem as if they had been there for any more than a few hours and they were already in need of eating, yet Moses survived 40 days without eating, sharpening this difference in behavior.

Proximity to Offerings

Perhaps one of the most fascinating articulations concerning the eating that took place is that of Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270) (popularly known as Ramban) articulates (ד"ה ויאכלו) רמב"ן על שמות כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה ויאכלו) (וישטו):

This means that they ate there the peace-offerings at the lower part of the mountain before God prior to their returning to their tents, for peace-offerings have to be eaten within an enclosure; in Jerusalem, they were eaten within the wall of the city. In Shiloh, they could be eaten within sight of Shiloh, and here they were eaten before the altar at the lower part of the mountain, and not in the camp.	שאכלו שם השלמים בתחתית ההר לפני האלהים טרם שישבו אל אלהיהם, כי השלמים טעונים מחיצה, ונאכלין בירושלם לפני מן החומה (זבחים נה:), ובשילה בכל הרואה (שם קיב:), וכאן היו נאכלין לפני המזבח תחת ההר, לא במחנה
--	---

Ramban's approach to the consumption of these offerings is that they had to eat them within a certain geographical proximity to their having offered them. In this sense, they consumed these offerings out of religious duty, which does not yield any negative valence to this consumption. Of course, he does not deal with the drinking aspect here, but it provides a positive religious angle to the consumption taking place at this time.

Celebrating Receiving the Torah

As opposed to simply being happy at seeing God or needing to now eat and drink, an altogether different description of the motivation for eating and drinking is something that Ramban articulates (רמב"ן על שמות) (כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה וישטו):

The meaning of the expression "and they drank" is that they made it an occasion for rejoicing and festival, for such is one's duty to rejoice at the receiving of the Torah, just as He commanded when they finished writing all the words of the Torah upon the stones....	וטעם וישטו ששעשו שמחה ויום טוב, כי כן חובה לשמוח בקבלת התורה, כאשר צוה בכתבם כל דברי התורה על האבנים....
---	--

From a more descriptive angle, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340) seems to echo this depiction of this scene as celebratory (הטור הארוך,) (שמות כ"ד:י"א, ד"ה וישטו):

They made a big party on the day of receiving the Torah, similar to the commandment of writing all of the Torah's words upon the stones: "and you shall sacrifice there offerings of well-being and eat them there" (Deut. 27:7) - that it is a commandment to rejoice at the covenant of the Torah.	שעשו שמחה גדולה ביום מתן תורה כאשר מצוה בכתבם כל דברי התורה באבנים וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם שמצוה לשמוח בברית התורה.
--	--

This celebratory approach to considering their actions certainly places the actions of these leaders in a very positive light. Not only is this eating and drinking something that is not considered in a negative light here, but elevated to celebrating receiving the Torah, as well.

Of course, the peculiar aspect here for both of these rabbis is that while they are describing the eating and drinking taking place in our verse, they make no reference to these leaders doing so while viewing God; instead, they discuss their celebrating the reception of the Torah. While the latter is certainly worthy of celebration, why do so while viewing God?

Enjoying Divine Bliss

A very different perspective than those that preceded it is that of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888), who wrote (שמות) רש"ר הירש על התורה, שמות) (כ"ד:י"א):

They felt God's closeness inwardly during the sacrificial meal, enjoying the bliss of Divine proximity within earthly life. ...	sie fühlten die Nähe Gottes in ihrem Innern beim Opfermahle (V. 5), sie genossen die Seligkeit der Gottesnähe mitten im irdischen Leben....
---	---



Rabbi Hirsch provides here a fascinating approach, perhaps one that is understandable to our era: this was an intense spiritual experience through this very direct exposure to God and, as such, ate and drank to help them experience this Divine closeness.

Conclusion

While it is already quite surprising to see over seven dozen leaders of our ancestors seeing God on top of a gorgeous sapphire pavement, perhaps even more shocking is that they eat and drink while seeing/watching God(!). They likely ate from the peace-offerings made before their ascending the mountain while also consuming wine (or, perhaps, water). While there are some voices critical of this consumptive behavior, there were also many medieval commentators who described these leaders' behavior as rejoicing over their experience of seeing God. While some commentators consider this eating and drinking to have taken place during these leaders' viewing of God, some were so surprised to consider that that they placed this consumptive behavior after their God-viewing. However this eating and drinking took place, may we be inspired by our ancestors' actions.

L'chaim

