

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.

Wine-Libating Vessels?

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): וְעָשִׂיתָ קַעֲרֹתָיו וְכַפְתָּיו וְקִשּׁוֹתָיו וּמִנְקִיָּתָיו אֲשֶׁר יִסַּךְ בְּהֶן זֶהָב טַהוֹר תַּעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם

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 יסך is not about pouring/libating, according to Rav Ketina, but covering the showbread. In describing Rav Ketina's description, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly referred to as Rashi), describes this covering as achieved through (הלחם בהן את הלחם):

The rods cover the bread between the hallah and its neighbor. שעל הלחם מסככין הקנים בין חלה לחברתה

Medieval Commentaries

By and large, Medieval Jewish commentaries translated יסך as covering, such as Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) and his grandson, Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (1085-1158) (see רש"י על שמות כ"ה:כ"ט, ד"ה אשר יסך בהן רשב"ם על שמות כ"ה:כ"ט, ד"ה and (וכפותיו וקשותיו ומנקיותיו respectively).

However, Rabbi Yoseph ben Yitzhak Bekhor Shor of Orleans (12th century) understood יסך in a libational sense (בכור שור), שמות כ"ה:כ"ט, ד"ה ועשית קערותיו (וכפותיו וקשותיו ומנקיותיו):

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. קשותיו כלים שנותנים בהם מים ללוש הלחם כדכתיב ואת קשות הנסך שהיו מנסכין הימנו המים על גבי הסולת ללוש

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

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How Much to Drink on Purim?

Talmudic Prescription

How much to drink on Purim has been a deeply vexing question in front of our rabbinic sages throughout the generations. It is certainly a struggle for the rabbis to consider Rava's famous declaration (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 Mordekhai." אַמַּר רַבָּא: מִיחֵיב אִינִישׁ לְבִסּוּמֵי בְּפֻרְיָא עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אָרוּר הַמֵּן לְבְרוּךְ מְרְדֳכַי

While many rabbis throughout the generations have taken this practice literally, and shared it in their writings as such, including Maimonides (שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים תרצ"ה:ב) and Rabbi Yosef Karo (משנה תורה, הלכות מגילה וחנוכה ב:ט"ו), there has also been a lot of pushback against Rava's apodictic statement.

Pushback Owing to Talmudic Story

One aspect of pushback has been considered as a result of the story that occurred on the page of Talmud following Rava's statement (Megillah 7b):

Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira made a Purim feast with each other, and they became intoxicated and Rabbah arose and slew Rabbi Zeira. The next day, he asked for mercy, and revived him. The next year, he said to him, "Let the Master come and let us prepare the Purim feast with each other." He said to him: "Miracles do not happen each and every hour." רבה ורבי זירא עבדו סעודת פורים בהדי הדדי איבסוּם קַם רבה שחטיה לרבי זירא למחר בעי רחמי ואחיה לשנה אמר ליה ניתי מר ונעביד סעודת פורים בהדי הדדי אמר ליה לא בכל שעתא ושעתא מתרחיש ניסא

While the story took place before Rava stated it, as Rabbah (270-330) was the teacher of Rava (280-352), the literary arrangement could be understood as negating Rava's statement. Indeed, this is articulated by Rabbi Ephraim ben Yitzhak ben Abraham of Regensburg (1110-1175), as quoted by Rabbi Karo (בית יוסף, אורח חיים תרצ"ה:א):

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{Vessels, continued from page 1}

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 שמות כ"ה:כ"ט, ד"ה הכתב והקבלה, שמות כ"ה:כ"ט, ד"ה ועשית קערותיו (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 (Artsroll))
- "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 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 (spoiler alert(!)). 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 🍷

{Purim-drinking, continued from page 1}

Rabbi Nissim ben Reuven (1290-1376) wrote in the name of Rabbi Ephraim ben Yitzḥak ben Abraham of Regensburg (1110-1175) that, from this incident where Rabbah slew Rabbi Zera at their Purim meal, it contradicts Rava's statement and it is not appropriate to act this way.	וכתב הר"ן בשם רבינו אפרים דמהווא עובדא דקם רבה בסעודת פורים ושחטיה לר' זירא כדאימא בגמרא אידחי ליה מימרא דרבה ולא שפיר דמי למעבד הכי
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This perspective certainly makes us wonder: how many different ways are there to consider these two texts with each other?

Perspectives on the Juxtaposition of The Story and Statement in the Talmud

There are four different ways of reading the juxtaposition of both Rava's apodictic statement, as well as the third-century Purim incident:

- As Rava was one of Rabbah's students, Rava learned from this incident regarding Purim-drinking and realized there had been no formal declaration about drinking on Purim (beyond the words of the book of Esther that they were days of drinking and rejoicing (Est. 9:22)), so he was inspired to articulate the normativity of this practice.
- Despite the incident occurring in the generation prior to Rava's statement, the arrangers of the Talmud decided to place the incident following Rava's statement to contradict the expectation of Purim-drunkenness, as Rabbi Ephraim ben Yitzḥak ben Abraham of Regensburg articulated.
- As Rabbi David Fried pointed out in episode 61 of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, “stories usually push back on a law rather than reinforcing it” such that, instead of saying that the incident negates Rava's statement, it actually pushes back against it, perhaps in the sense of seeing it as a cautionary tale, but not fully negating Rava's statement.
- Another chronological perspective, similar to the first one above, is that, despite one reading Rava's statement, and being utterly astonished, thinking that it his statement was meant as mere hyperbole, the arrangers of the Talmudic section actually provided the story in order to demonstrate how far one might (or, perhaps, even should) take their Purim-drinking regarding inebriation.

In sum, it's not entirely clear from reading these two texts how the narrative incident necessarily interfaces with Rava's apodictic statement. Nevertheless, rabbis throughout the generations were influenced by Rabbi Ephraim ben Yitzḥak ben Abraham of Regensburg's perspective.

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PURIM WORKOUT



...and repeat

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

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Is Drunkenness Even Allowed?

In addition to quoting Rabbi Ephraim of Regensburg, Rabbi Karo also quotes another earlier rabbinic author who wrote (בית יוסף, אורח חיים) (תרכ"א):

Not that one should get drunk, since drunkenness is a serious prohibition and there is no greater transgression than this, since it leads to sexual immorality, murder, and many other transgressions aside from these. However, one should drink more than they are used to drinking.

לא שישתכר
שהשכרות איסור
גמור ואין לך עבירה
גדולה מזו שהוא
גורם לג"ע וש"ד
וכמה עבירות זולתן
אך שישת' יותר
מלימודו מעט

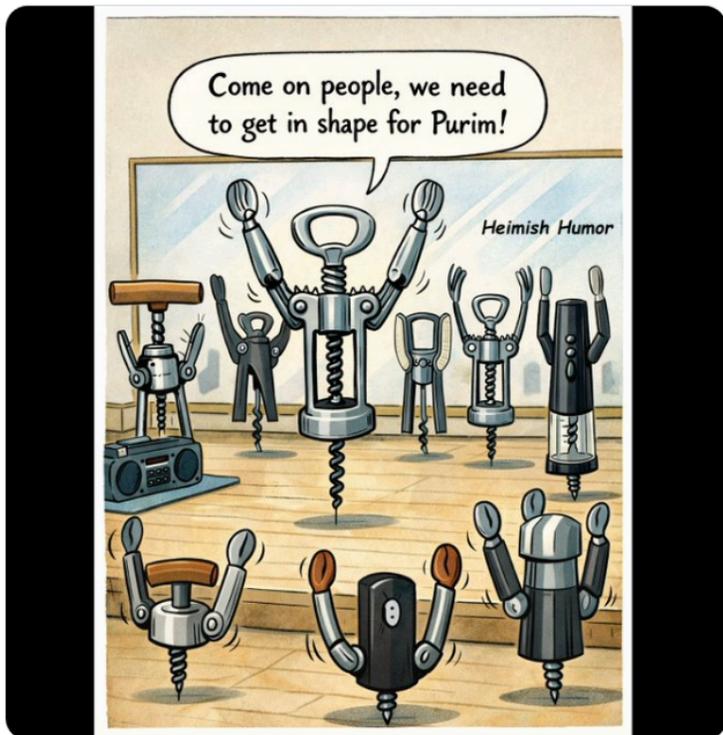


While a prohibition exists in neither the Bible nor the Talmud against drunkenness (for more on drunkenness, see episode #162 of *The Jewish Drinking Show* on drunkenness in the Bible, and episodes #163-166 of *The Jewish Drinking Show* on drunkenness in rabbinic literature), that rabbinic author clearly considered actions undertaken drunkenly to be deeply problematic. Moreover, in both the Bible and rabbinic literature, especially the Talmud, drunkenness is an embedded part of rabbinic life. So there is clearly no such prohibition against drunkenness, Talmudically-speaking.

Despite Rabbi Karo quoting these medieval rabbis who clearly saw the story as problematic, he, nevertheless, quotes Rava verbatim in his *Set Table* (שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים תרכ"ה:ב) (תרכ"ה:ב), seemingly working off of what Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340) had previously written (אורח חיים) (תרכ"ה):

It is a *mitzvah* to increase the festive meal of Purim, and one is required to become drunk until one does not know the difference between "Cursed is Haman" and "Blessed is Mordechai".

מצוה להרבות
בסעודת פורים
וצריך שישתכר
עד שלא ידע בין
ארור המן לברוך
מרדכי



12:41 PM • Feb 19, 2026 • 1,116 Views

Drinking, But Not Getting Drunk

One strategy that Rabbi Yaakov ben Moshe Levi Moelin (1365-1427) devised was to drink some, but not get drunk, as referenced by Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530-1572) (מפה על שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים תרכ"ה:ב):

Some say it is not necessary to become drunk so much, but rather to drink more than he is used to (Kol Bo), and to fall asleep, and, while he sleeps, he does not know [the difference] between "accursed is Haman" and "blessed is Mordechai".

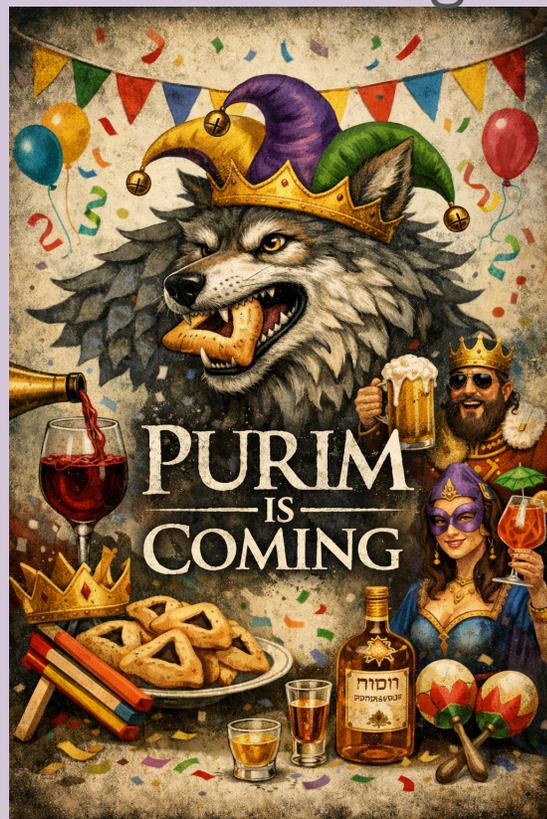
וי"א דא"צ להשתכר
כל כך אלא שישתה
יותר מלימודו וישן
ומתוך שישן אינו יודע
בין ארור המן לברוך
מרדכי

By engaging in one's Purim celebration in this fashion demonstrates that one is still taking part in the pleasure of the day, drinking more than they are used to, but not actually getting drunk. This creatively lenient perspective found favor amongst rabbis in subsequent generations, including, but in no way limited to Rabbi Elazar Rokeach (1665-1742) (מעשה רקח על הלכות מגילה וחנוכה ב:ט"ז:א), Rabbi Joseph ben Meir Teomim (1727-1792) (פרי מגדים - משבצות זהב), Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1804-1886) (קיצור שלחן ערוך קמ"ב:ו), and Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838-1933) (ברורה תרכ"ה:ד).

Purim is Coming

With **only ten days** away, there has been Purim-related content in these pages in recent weeks, as well as this week and next, helping us get in the Purim spirit, including when to drink, who drinks, and how much to drink on Purim.

Purim resources are also available at



JewishDrinking.com/Purim

How Does One Know if They Drank Enough?

How much is enough, even if one is drinking a lot? Does one have to drink until they really cannot make the moral distinction between Haman and Mordechai, or is it just a clever turn of phrase? One suggestion referenced a poem/song that had these words and, if one slurred their words while reciting it, then they have achieved this requisite state. Another employs a type of gematria, or Hebraic numerical equivalency, in which one fails to do the proper math. Another idea is to sing a certain song with specific words.

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{Purim-drinking, continued from page 3}

Purim Episodes

As drinking on Purim is a well-known and quite debated Jewish practice, *The Jewish Drinking Show* has published over multiple episodes on this topic:

- Ep. #20: Purim-Drinking in [Lubavitcher] Hasidic Thought with Rabbi Eli Simpson
- Ep. #21: Rava, Mordechai, and Purim-Drinking with Rabbi Ayalon Eliach
- Ep. #22: Drinking on Purim in The Talmud with Prof. Jordan Rosenblum
- Ep. #59: A Kabbalistic Approach to Purim-Drinking with Professor Vadim Putzu
- Ep. #60: Drinking Parties In The Book Of Esther with Professor Joshua Joel Spoelstra
- Ep. #61: Medieval Jewish Legal Authorities (*Rishonim*) on Purim-Drunkenness with Rabbi David Fried
- Ep. #94: 16th-17th Century Rabbis On Purim-Drinking (Early *Aḥaronim*) with Rabbi David Fried
- Ep. #127: 18th & 19th Century Rabbis (Later *Aḥaronim*) on Purim-drinking with Rabbi David Fried
- Ep. #152: Two Twentieth Century Rabbis on Purim-Drinking: Rabbi Kook & Rabbi Hutner with Rabbi David Fried
- Ep. #172 - Women Drinking on Purim? with Rabbanit Debbie Zimmerman



JewishDrinking.com/show



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One articulation of both of these was described by Rabbi Eliyahu Spira (1660–1712) who mentioned that that some say there is a song that had a refrain of "cursed is Haman" and the next refrain was "blessed is Mordechai" and one needs to sing this song without any errors (אליהו רבה) (על שלחן ערוך אורח חיים תרצ"ה:ב). Whether one employs the simple need to not be able to differentiate between these two or an advanced distinction, such as either mathematical or in song, there are certainly some interesting considerations on this front.



On Purim you should get so drunk that you can't tell the difference between blessed is a Jedi and cursed is a Sith.

Ad d'Lo Yoda

6:56 PM · Mar 5, 2025 · 1,776 Views

A Creative Understanding

A fascinatingly creative understanding of Rava's statement was considered by Rabbi David HaLevi Segal (1586-1667) (טורי זהב על שולחן) (ערוך אורח חיים תרצ"ה:א), a helpful description of which was provided by Rabbi David Fried on the 94th episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*:

He develops this idea that there were two great acts of kindness that God performed in the Purim story: one was the downfall of Haman, which obviously entailed the rescue of Jewish people and two was after all that and promotes Mordechai and gives him Haman's house and makes him this great person throughout all the Persian Empire. "Cursed is Haman" refers to God's kindness to us in foiling haman's plan and "blessed is Mordechai" refers to God's kindness in allowing all the greatness that happened to Mordechai and the Jewish people afterwards. "Until one doesn't know" means you're at the point where you couldn't have a theological discussion about which kindness from God is greater.

What's striking about this explanation is that he ties all of the aspects of Rava's prescription together in a meaningful way.

Conclusion

While this prescriptive statement of Rava's to get drunk on Purim has received a lot of pushback over the years from rabbis, there exists both the ability to fulfill his prescription, as well as to wiggle out of it merely by drinking a little bit more than one is accustomed to drinking.

Nevertheless, there is something to be said for Rava's articulation of celebrating Purim, which could get away from us by performing the various mitzvot of the day, but not actually seeking to enjoy the day. Having shared in last week's issue ("Who is to Drink on Purim?") that Rava is the Talmud's greatest wine-drinker, he may have made this statement in the sense of "If you're going to drink and get drunk on any number of occasions throughout the year, you have got to make sure to do so on Purim" (otherwise, you would be missing out).

However, perhaps those who are less familiar with drinking or getting drunk may be content to do as Rabbi Isserles and others wrote, simply to drink a bit to enjoy the day, but not needing to get drunk.

However you celebrate Purim, I am wishing you a healthy, happy, enjoyable, and responsible Purim 🍷

L'chaim 🍷