

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.

The First Libation Command

While the first libation to God recorded in the Torah is when Jacob pours a libation to God at Beth-El (Gen. 35:14), God does not command any libations until...you guessed it - this week's Torah portion! This very first divine command to offer wine to Him occurs within the procedure for offerings (Ex. 29:38-42), accompanying the lambs we are commanded to sacrifice to God, both in the morning and in the evening, with a quarter-hin of wine for each lamb (Ex. 29:40-41):

There shall be a tenth of a measure of choice flour with a quarter of a <i>hin</i> of beaten oil mixed in, and a libation of a quarter <i>hin</i> of wine for one lamb; and you shall offer the other lamb at twilight, repeating with it the meal offering of the morning with its libation—an offering by fire for a pleasing odor to The LORD	וְעֹשֶׂן סֹלֶת בָּלוּל בְּשֶׁמֶן כְּתִית הַבֶּעֱהוּן לְסֶכֶר רְבִיעֵת הַהִין וְיָן לְכֶבֶשׂ הָאֶחָד: (מֵא) וְאֵת הַכֶּבֶשׂ הַשֵּׁנִי תַעֲשֶׂה בֵּין הָעֶרְבַּיִם כְּמִנְחַת הַבֶּקֶר וּכְנֹסְכָה תַעֲשֶׂה לָּהּ לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ אֲשֶׁה לָּהּ
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While this was meant for the inauguration of the tabernacle, it was also meant to serve as "עֹלֶת תְּמוּד לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם" a regular burnt offering throughout the generations" (Ex. 29:42). This is no small amount of wine. Indeed, in contemporary measurements, this yields nearly two bottles of wine.

Separate Offering?

For an insightful explanation of this libation, Rabbi Avraham, son of Maimonides (1186-1237) wrote (ר' אברהם בן הרמב"ם על שמות כ"ט:מ'): The wine that is thrown on top of the altar with the sacrifice is called *nesekh* because it is a drink offering on its own and its offering is not the same as the (offering) of the oil, which is a liquid, [it is not] an offering on its own, but mixed with finely sifted flour and, for this reason, the wine is called *nesekh* because it is poured on the sides of the altar in a spilling manner to baste it as the oil would baste what is poured in it...

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For Rabbi Avraham, son of Maimonides, he argues that the wine libation is not merely just a complementary part of the other items being offered, but an offering on its own. He also describes the difference of the oil versus the wine in terms of their roles with regard to the daily offering, identifying the oil as being part of an offering with the fine flour, versus the wine, which is a libation offering on its own.



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What to Drink on Purim?

While readers of this publication might be well aware that drinking is a felicitous and enhancing aspect of Purim, something that is not often discussed is: What are we supposed to drink on Purim?

Bible

When we read the Book of Esther on Purim about the many drinking parties and all the wine that has drunk during these stories, ultimately they are described as "יְמֵי מְשֻׁתָּה וְשִׂמְחָה" days of drinking and festiveness" (Est. 9:22), but not necessarily specifically of wine-drinking. When it comes to what to drink on Purim, it might seem that the obvious choice would be wine. After all, any reader of the book of Esther sees that there are multiple references to drinking wine, especially the wine-drinking parties that Esther hosts which turns the story on its head with regards to the fate of the Jews.

Talmud

When we read of Rava's famous statement obligating getting drunk on Purim (*Megillah* 7b), he curiously omits any reference to wine. While, on the face of it, it may seem not noteworthy, Rava turns out to be the biggest wine-lover of the Babylonian Talmud. That the Talmud's biggest wine-lover does not obligate one's Purim-drinking to be accomplished with wine is fascinatingly shocking.

One wonders if Rava was seeking to be pluralistic with regards to one's beverage, especially since he lived at a time and a place when beer-consumption was on the rise amongst Jews. In fact, his father-in-law, Rav H̄isda, greatly enjoyed beer, while his student, Rav Pappa, was the Babylonian Talmud's greatest beer-brewer, which even leads to an amusing moment in the Talmud where Rava acknowledges this difference between them (*Berachot* 44b). So, maybe Rava left open the possibility for one to get drunk on Purim off of whichever beverage one preferred.

Medieval Rabbis

While we read of rabbis describing getting drunk during the medieval era, none of them seem to specify that this getting drunk be done with wine. Sure, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) describes the Talmudic passage as being done with wine (רש"י על מגילה ז' ב'ז; ד"ה לאבסומי), but that seems to be helping us understand what is going on in the text. Similarly, Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138-1204) (popularly known as Rambam and/or Maimonides) wrote (משנה תורה, הלכות מגילה וחנוכה ב:ט"ו):

What is the nature of our obligation for this feast?	כִּיצַד חוֹבַת סְעֻדָה זוֹ. שְׂיֵאכַל בִּשְׂר וַיִּתְקַן סְעֻדָה נְאֻה כְּפִי אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יְדוֹ. וְשׁוֹתָהּ יוֹן עַד שִׁשְׁמֵכֶר וַיִּרְדָּם בְּשִׁכְרוֹתוֹ....
A person should eat meat and prepare as attractive a feast as his means permit. He should drink wine until he becomes intoxicated and falls asleep in a stupor....	

How much of Maimonides' description of wine here is meant as to specify wine in exclusion to all other alcoholic beverages, versus how much might he mean it as a catchall term for any/all types of alcoholic beverages? Taken together, Rashi and Rambam seem to mention wine as describing it as an alcoholic beverage rather than specifying it to exclude others.

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{Libation, continued from previous page}

Specialness of Wine

As to the specialness of wine, Rabbi Yitzhak ben Judah Abarbanel (1437–1508) wrote on what the wine uniquely brings to this daily offering (אברבנאל על שמות כ"ט:מ):

...He commanded that wine be poured upon it as a remembrance of its joy (the reception of the Torah) because "wine makes human hearts happy" (Ps. 104:15) and commanded that it be a quarter of a <i>hin</i> because it is the amount that will be enough to enjoy, yet not approach getting drunk.	...צוה שינסך עליה יין לזכרון שמחתה כי היין ישמח לבב אנוש. וצוה שהיה רביעית ההין כי הוא הכמות שישפיק לשמוח ולא יגיע לשכר
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What Rabbi Abarbanel adds here is speaking to what wine uniquely brings to the offering, although what is curious is that, while he is correct in that wine makes human hearts happy, it is actually meant not for human consumption, but rather meant for the Divine.

However, perhaps he means that, just as wine makes human hearts happy (Ps. 104:15), and humans are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), then the wine that God commands to be libated to Him is in order for Him to enjoy and become happy through it, yet not so much that He gets drunk via this wine.

The Force of the Motion

As to the wording of what this libation is and its directionality, Rabbi Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenburg (1785–1865) described it as follows (הכתב והקבלה, שמות כ"ט:מ, ד"ה ונסך רביעית):

The term <i>libation</i> , according to Rabbi Shlomo Pappenheim (1740–1814), denotes a pouring done with rinsing force and speed, in such a way that what is poured spreads over the surface this way and that. For he pours and scatters so that the libation spreads over the entire face of the altar. And [Reish Lakish, one of our Sages said that at the time when they would pour the wine upon the altar, they would plug the openings of the drainage ducts, so that the wine would spread over the altar, in order to fulfill the verse "a strong drink libation" (Num. 28:70, meaning that the altar should be intoxicated and satisfied from the libations of the offering (<i>Sukkah</i> 49b).	שם נסך הוראתו לרש"פ על שפיקה הנעשה בשטיפה ומהירות באופן שיתפשט הנשפך על השטח אילך ואילך, שמנסך ומפור כדי שיתפשט הנסך על כל פני המזבח, וארז"ל (סוכה מ"ט) בזמן שמנסכין יין ע"ג המזבח היו פוקקין מקום השיתין כדי שיתפשט היין ע"ג המזבח לקיים הסך נסך שכר, שהיה המזבח שכור ושבע מנסכי הקרבן
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Rabbi Pappenheim, as quoted by Rabbi Mecklenburg, argues that the language of *נסך*, which is reminiscent of "covering" is called this term since it *covers* the altar, which expands upon what Rabbi Avraham, son of Maimonides had previously written.

Conclusion

The Torah's first instance of a commandment to libate is that of wine, which is to be done twice daily. This action is described in Hebrew with a language reminiscent of covering, which is described by some commentators as such on account of it being used to cover the altar. And this first commandment for us to provide to God seems to be enough to provide happiness.

L'chaim 

{Purim, continued from previous page}

Indeed, Rava's statement gets quoted verbatim by Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488–1575) in his *Set Table* (SA OH §695:2), lacking any specificity for having to drink wine on Purim, allowing for other beverages to be consumed on Purim. Moreover, the rabbis of the 16th–17th centuries seem to also not particularly discuss what one is to drink on Purim, seemingly being okay with whichever beverages one would like to drink.

18th–19th Centuries

However, that all changed for the 18th–19th centuries, as Rabbi Elijah Spira (1660–1712) wrote (אליה רבה על שלחן ערוך אורח חיים תרצ"ה:א):

The matter of Haman's downfall occurred through a wine-drinking party; therefore, the sages obligated to get drunk in order to remember the great miracle through wine-drinking.	ענין המן ומפלתו על ידי משתה היין, ולכן חייבו חכמים להשתכר עד כדי שהיה מזכר הנס הגדול בשתיית היין
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His innovative approach to privileging wine over other beverages on Purim then influenced later rabbis with significant works, such as Rabbi Avraham Danzig (1748–1820) in his *Hayyei Adam* (155:30), Rabbi Shlomo Ganzfried (1804–1886) in his *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* (142:6), and Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kagan (1838–1933) in his *Bi'ur Halakhah* (695:2:2).

(Perhaps we could consider this approach being very similar to Hanukkah in that even though one can use various methods of lighting a menorah, since the miracle was achieved through the use of olive oil, there is a special meaning to be carried out through the use of olive oil. So, too, with Purim, since the miracle took place through Esther's deployment of wine, causing Haman's downfall, thereby preventing the annihilation of the Jewish people, so, too, we should drink wine to commemorate our having been saved from destruction.)

Whiskey?

One wonders if Rabbi Spira and those rabbis who followed in his footsteps made it a specific point to privilege wine, as they witnessed not only the introduction of whiskey, but also a rise in whiskey-consumption, that they sought a return to drinking wine for Purim. In fact, it got to the point in the 19th century that Rabbi Yehiel Mikhel Epstein (1829–1908) wrote (*Arukh HaShulhan*, OH 695:5):

Practically, one should distance oneself from drunkenness – especially from drinking whiskey – for in his intoxication he may become filled with vomit and filth.	ולמעשה יש להתרחק מן השכרות, ובפרט שתיית יין שרוף, שבשכרותו יתמלא קיאו צואה
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Perhaps for these rabbis, there is something traditional, simple, or even more elegant of choosing wine over whiskey.

Conclusion

Despite being the Talmud's greatest wine-lover, Rava's statement in the Talmud about getting drunk on Purim does not specify that one should necessarily do so over wine. Perhaps he did not specify that it should be carried out over wine in order to provide the openness to other beverages, such as enjoyed by his father-in-law and one of his students.

We see a new interest in the 18th and 19th centuries of rabbis explicitly preferring wine on account of the miracle in the book of Esther prominently featuring wine. While it is unclear if this new interest was on account of the rise of whiskey and/or other distilled spirits, there are those who prefer enjoying wine on this festive occasion. However you celebrate, I'm wishing you a joyous and festive Purim!

L'chaim 

