

# ONEG SHABBAS

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

## Blood: A Forbidden Beverage

In this week's Torah portion, we see a clear prohibition against the consumption of blood (Lev. 3:17):

It is an enduring particular law wherever you dwell: you must not eat any fat or any blood.  
חֲקֵת עוֹלָם לְדֹרֹתֶיכֶם בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם כְּלִי-חֶלֶב וְכֹל-דָּם לֹא תֹאכְלוּ

While there was a previous prohibition already mentioned against blood-consumption (Gen. 9:4), this seems to be brought up at this place in the Torah due to all of the offerings taking place in the text. Yet, you might ask, why are we discussing eating blood, since this publication concerns drinking? We are discussing it in these terms, since our sages considered this blood a beverage that could be drunk.

### Rabbis Consider Blood as a Beverage

While we do not typically consider blood as a beverage, our sages certainly did, as it can be drunk. In fact, you can go ahead and search online for news articles about those who drink blood, whether human or otherwise. Spoiler alert: doctors recommend against it. Nevertheless, the Mishnah includes blood as one of seven beverages that cause impurity (mMakhshirin 6:4):

There are seven beverages: dew, water, wine, oil, blood, milk, and bees' honey.  
שֶׁבַע מִשְׁקִין הֵן. הַטֵּל וְהַמַּיִם, הַיַּיִן וְהַשֶּׁמֶן, וְהַדָּם, וְהַחֲלָב, וְדִבְשׁ דְּבוּרִים

While we certainly consider wine, milk, and water as consumable beverages, others on this list may not necessarily make us consider them as such. Nevertheless, blood can certainly be a beverage. This is made clear to us, as the rabbis considered this, as well (תוספתא שבת (ט"ז):

Whence is it that blood is a beverage? As it is said: "And drunk the blood of the slain" (Num. 23:24).  
מִנֵּין לָדָם שֶׁהוּא מִשְׁקָה שְׂנֵאמַר (בַּמִּדְבָּר כִּי:ג'כ"ד) וְדָם חֲלָלִים יִשְׁתֶּה

This Scriptural proof that is being referenced in the Tosefta is not that of any humans drinking the blood, but rather animals doing so, as Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (1250-1310) described is what is going on from earlier in the verse in that Numbers quote (ד"ה ודם חללים ישתה).

### 4th Century Articulation of Drinking of Blood

While those texts above discuss blood as a beverage, what about their consumption, which, as we read in our Torah portion, is described as eating? For this, a fourth-century sage describes it as drinking (תלמוד ירושלמי מעשר שני ב:א"ב):

Whence is it that drinking is included in eating?  
מִנֵּין שֶׁהִשְׁתִּיָּה בְּכֹל אֲכִילָה  
Rabbi Yonah understood it from the following: "Therefore, I said to the Children of Israel: 'No person among you may eat blood'" (Lev. 17:12).  
רַבִּי יוֹנָה שָׁמַע לֵה מִן הַדָּא. עַל כֵּן אָמַרְתִּי לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כְּלִי-נֶפֶשׁ מִכֶּם לֹא יֹאכַל דָּם

This is a very clear articulation that, despite the language of "eating" blood, it is, indeed, a matter of drinking.

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## Which Wine to Drink for the 4 Cups?

When it comes to drinking four cups at the Passover Seder, wine is the expected beverage to be drunk for these four cups. Do all wines count?

### Talmudic Statements on Wine for the Four Cups

There is a second century text that is accepting of all wines (Pesahim 108b):

These four cups must contain one quarter-log, whether the wine is undiluted or diluted, whether it is new or aged.  
אַרְבַּעָה כּוֹסוֹת הַלֵּלוּ צֵרִיךְ שְׁיֵהָא בְּהֵן כְּדִי רְבִיעִית, אֶחָד חִי וְאֶחָד מְזוּג, אֶחָד חֲדָשׁ וְאֶחָד יָשֵׁן

Thereupon, Rabbi Yehudah (2nd century) argues against this very open and welcoming position, restricting what one can use (ibid.):

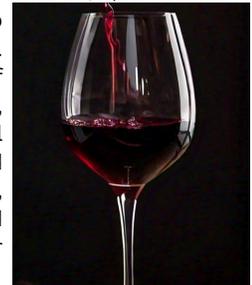
Rabbi Yehudah says: "[The wine for the four cups of wine at the Seder] must have the taste and appearance of wine."  
רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אָמַר: צֵרִיךְ שְׁיֵהָא בּו טַעַם וּמְרֵאָה יוּן

While it is unclear which types of wine don't look like wine (perhaps it could be cloudy or some other non-wine appearance), the Talmud's greatest wine-lover, Rava (280 – 352) offered (ibid.):

Rava said: "What is Rabbi Yehudah's reason for making this statement? As it is written: 'Only look upon wine when it reddens' (Prov. 23:31)."  
אָמַר רַבָּא: מַאי טַעְמָא דְרַבִּי יְהוּדָה, דְּכֹתִיב: "אַל תִּרְא יוּן כִּי יִתְאֲדָם"



To Rava's understanding, Rabbi Yehudah seems to be speaking about the color of the wine for the cups. In this way, Rava explicitly favors the redness of wine for the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, which makes sense, since he used this Scriptural verse for arguing that one should only ever use red wine for Shabbat kiddush (Bava Batra 97b). Clearly, the Talmud's greatest wine-lover not only preferred red wines versus white wines in general, but also for ritual use.



Moreover, it would seem it was not a mere personal preference for him, as we read of another fourth century rabbi to privilege red wine for the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, as we read (yShekalim 3:2):

Rabbi Yirmiyah said: "It is a commandment to fulfill one's requirement of four cups of wine at the Passover Seder with red wine, as it is said, 'Only look at wine when it reddens...' (Prov. 23:31)."  
אָמַר רַבִּי יִרְמְיָה מִצְוָה לְצַאֵת בֵּין אָדָם שְׂנֵאמַר אֶל- תִּרְא יוּן כִּי יִתְאֲדָם

So, rabbis in both Israel and Persia in the fourth century were not only explicitly advocating the use of red wine for the four cups of wine at the Passover Seder, but also using the same scriptural verse to do so.

That may have had something to do with a widespread preference for red wine over white wine, as we read of Rava's father-in-law contrasting them (Gittin 70a):

Rav Hisda said: "There are sixty types of wine. The best of them all is red, fragrant; the worst of them all is inferior white wine."  
רַב חִסְדָּא: שִׁיתִין מִיני חֲמַרָה הֵוּוּ, מַעֲלִיא דְכּוֹלֵהוּ - סוּמְקָא רִיחַתְנָא, גְרִיעָא דְכּוֹלֵהוּ - טִילִיא חִינְרָא

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# New Episode

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* is now out, on plague-themed cocktails, especially for either one's Seder or pre-Seder.

The episode is available on YouTube, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or wherever else you enjoy listening to podcasts, as well as at

[JewishDrinking.com/PlagueCocktails](http://JewishDrinking.com/PlagueCocktails)



{Blood-drinking from previous page}

## What About Coagulated Blood?

Another question that arises is blood which is no longer in liquid form considered a liquid? It seems that the Talmudic rabbis understood it to encompass a problem even if the blood was made into a non-liquid (*Hullin* 120a):

One who caused blood to coagulate and ate it or melted forbidden fat and swallowed it is liable. הקפה את הדם ואכלו או שהמחה את החלב וגמעו חייב



While this is a problematic behavior, as we read in this week's Torah portion that it is consuming/eating, is it a beverage and/or is it drinking? As we see in the following Talmudic discussion, it seems unclear (תלמוד ירושלמי מעשר שני ב"א:ב):

How do we consider congealed blood? But is it not taught: "Congealed blood is neither food nor drink?" So we must hold as is, and the Torah called it "eating."

מה נן קיימין אם בדם שקרש. והתני דם שקרש אינו לא אכל ולא משקה. אלא כי נן קיימין כמות שהוא והתורה קראת אותו אכילה.



In this consideration, while the blood is no longer a liquid, it is no longer a beverage, yet its consumption remains problematic, leaving the language to consider it as "eating".

## Pernicious Blood Libels

During this time of year, the notion of blood-drinking is particularly uncomfortable, owing to the pernicious and false blood libels made against Jews for centuries. This ultimately came along with terrible anti-Semitic notions of Jews as blood-sucking vampires, especially in the 19th and early 20th century up until the Holocaust. For readers of this publication, you will have noticed what Rabbi David HaLevy Segal wrote that, in his time in Poland, Jews did not drink red wine at the Passover Seder for fear of the blood libels, preferring to stick to white wine for the Four Cups of Wine at the Seder.

## Conclusion

While we might not consider the prohibition against eating of blood in our Torah portion as having anything to do with drinking, yet our sages clearly perceived this prohibition even extending to drinking blood, yielding it as a drinking prohibition in our tradition.

There have also been deeply unfortunate and false blood libels against the Jewish people have not been prevalent enough to get in our way of consuming red wine at the Passover Seder these days, ultimately, Jews never consumed blood, it has never been part of our tradition in any which way, and we should be fortunate to celebrate our Passover Seders with red wine this year.

L'chaim



## {4 cups-drinking from previous page} Other Rabbinic Considerations of Wines

In that same section previously mentioned in the Talmud Yerushalmi, there are several varieties of wine that are considered (*yShekalim* 3:2):

May one fulfill his obligation with Sabbatical wine? מהו לצאת ב"ין של שביעית.

Rabbi Hoshai taught: "One may fulfill his obligation with Sabbatical wine." תנא רב אושעיה. ויצאין ב"ין של שביעית.

May one fulfill his obligation with spiced wine? מהו לצאת בקונדיטון.

Since Bar Qappara taught: "Spiced wine is like wine", which implies that one may fulfill his obligation with spiced wine. מדתני בר קפרא. קונדיטון ק"ן.

May one fulfill his obligation with mixed wine? הדא אמרה. ויצאין ב"ין קונדיטון.

Rabbi Hiyya taught: "The Four Cups which they prescribed, one may fulfill his obligation either with unmixed or mixed, on condition that it have the taste and looks of wine." מהו לצאת ב"ין מזוגין. מדתני רבי חייא. ארבעה כוסות שאמר ויצאין בהן ב"ין וצ"ן מזוגין ובלבד שיהא בהן טעם ומראה י"ן.

... ...

May one fulfill his obligation with cooked wine? מהו לצאת ב"ין מבושל.

Rabbi Yonah said: "One may fulfill his obligation with cooked wine." אמר רבי יונה. ויצאין ב"ין מבושל.

In sum, these wines about which are queried and considered, all of them end up being articulated as being effective for use for the four cups at the Passover Seder. This discussion considered spiced wines, mixed wines, and cooked wines, all of which have been altered from their regular wine form, but, nevertheless, permitted for use for the four cups. The other type of wine considered is sabbatical year wine, meaning it derived from grapes harvested in Israel during a sabbatical year, the most recent of which was 2022.

## What About White Wine?

What about white wine, though? Rabbi Yaakov, son of Asher (1270-1340) (popularly known as the Rosh) opens up the possibility (טור או"ח תע"ב):

And it is stated in the Jerusalem Talmud that there is a mitzvah to seek out red wine, but one should see if the white wine is of better quality than the red, then it takes precedence. ואיתא בירושלמי שמצוה לחזור אחר יין אדום ויראה שאם הלבן משובח מהאדום שהוא קודם.

Rabbi Yosef Karo wrote straightforwardly concerning this preference (שו"ע תע"ב:י"א):

It's a mitzvah to seek red wine. מצוה לחזור אחר יין אדום.

Parenthetically commenting thereupon, Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530-1572) agreed with Rabbi Ya'akov, son of Asher (רמ"א לשו"ע או"ח תע"ב:י"א),

If the white wine is not preferable than [red wine]. אם אין הלבן משובח ממנו.

While it seems to be that he is discussing one's own personal palate preference, it could also be better for safety reasons, as Rabbi David HaLevi Segal (1586-1667) (popularly known as Taz) wrote (ט"ז או"ח תע"ב:ט):

There is another hint in the red color – as a remembrance of the blood, since Pharaoh used to slaughter the children of Israel. However, nowadays people refrain from using red wine due to false blood libels, unfortunately. יש עוד רמז לאדום זכר לדם שהי' פרעה שוחט בני ישראל והאינדא נמנעו מליקח יין אדום מפני עלילות שקרים בעו"ה.

## Conclusion

While we can drink a variety of wines for the four cups at the Passover Seder, including modified wines, such as cooked wines and spiced wines, there remains a distinct preference for red wine in our tradition, seemingly because it tastes better. However, should one enjoy white wine more, or if there is a blood libel, then white wine may also be considered an ideal option. Whichever wine(s) you choose to use at your Passover Seder for your four cups, I am wishing you an enjoyable Passover Seder experience.

L'chaim

