

# ONEG SHABBAS

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

## Fetal Drinking?



While we typically think of Jewish drinking in our own lives and experiences we can remember, one aspect of drinking we typically don't consider is fetal drinking. No, I do not mean getting drunk and ending up in a fetal position; I mean drinking while being a fetus. As our Torah portion opens up about pregnancy (Lev. 12:1-8), there are some rabbinic midrashim that discuss this aspect of drinking.

### Midrashic Take

As part of his description of the fetal experience, one of the Talmud's most famous expounders shared in the third century (*Niddah* 30b):

Rabbi Simlai expounded: "To what is a fetus in its mother's womb comparable? To a folded notebook. And it rests with its hands on its two sides, its two arms on its two knees, and its two heels on its two buttocks, and its head rests between its knees, and its mouth is closed, and its umbilicus is open. And it eats from what its mother eats, and it drinks from what its mother drinks, and it does not emit excrement lest it kill its mother. But once it emerges into the airspace of the world, the closed limb, i.e., its mouth opens, and the open limb, its umbilicus, closes, as otherwise it cannot live for even one hour..."

דרש רבי שמלאי למה הולד דומה במעי אמו לפנקס שמקופל ומונח ידיו על שתי צדעיו שתי אציליו על ב' ארכובותיו ובי' עקביו על ב' עגבותיו וראשו מונח לו בין ברכיו ופיו סתום וטבורו פתוח ואוכל ממה שאמו אוכלת ושותה ממה שאמו שותה ואינו מוציא רעי שמא יהרוג את אמו וכיון שיצא לאויר העולם נפתח הסתום ונסתם הפתוח שאלמלא כן אינו יכול לחיות אפילו שעה אחת

This is a rather curious description, although, as Dr. Jeremy Brown writes, it's actually not incorrect ("*Niddah* 30b ~ Talmudic Embryology",

Talmudic embryology reflected the prevailing Greek theories of the times. But those theories developed without the benefit of microscopes and the other tools later available to scientists. Despite this, sometimes, the rabbis of the Talmud were spot on with their embryology. Today's statement of Rav Simlai is a good example. ... It is a perfect description of a growing fetus, written as if Leonardo Da Vinci's famous sketch.

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## Impurifying Beverages Through the Air?

While reading this week's Torah portion, one gets the sense that there is nothing that has to do with either drinks nor drinking. Yet, there seems to be an aspect of potential impurity, at least according to one rabbinic opinion regarding the following verse (Lev. 15:12):

An earthen vessel that the one who has had abnormal seminal discharge touches shall be broken; and any wooden implement shall be rinsed with water.

Ostensibly that says nothing to do with drinks nor drinking. Yet, we read of a second-century's sage making such a connection with this verse (פסא, מצורע פרשת זבים, פרשה ג ג):

Rabbi Shimon said: "What does this come to teach us?

If that one who has had abnormal seminal discharge confers impurity upon vessels requiring rinsing, by touching (them), is it not already written 'and he who touches the flesh of the one who has had abnormal seminal discharge shall launder his clothes' (Lev. 15:7)? If one who touches the one who has had abnormal seminal discharge thereby confers impurity upon vessels requiring rinsing, then if he himself (touches them), how much more so should he confer impurity upon them!" "If so, then why is it said 'and every wooden vessel shall be rinsed in water'?" "Rather, these are the foods, beverages, and vessels above the one who has had abnormal seminal discharge."

So, this is an intriguing midrashic development from the verse that then leads to even beverages (e.g. wine) becoming impure not even directly touching such a person..

Providing an explanation to this expansion of this impurity to those items (including drinks) above this person, Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Mikhel Wisser (1809-1879) explains (מלבי"ם על ויקרא, מצורע קמ"ה:א):

This is something that was unnecessary to say, since Scripture has already explained that a person who touches a man who has had an abnormal seminal discharge impurifies vessels, as it was written "he shall launder his clothes" (Lev. 15:7), and, all the more so, [one who has been touched by] a man who has had an abnormal seminal discharge. But Rabbi Shimon's explanation concerns the vessels, the foods, and the beverages that are above the man who has had an abnormal seminal discharge, even though they were not in contact with the man who has had an abnormal seminal discharge.

וקלי-תרש אשר יגע בו הנב ישבר וכל-כלי-עץ ישטף במים

אמר ר' שמעון, מה בא זה ללמד שמטמא כלי שטף במגע והלא כבר נאמר "והנוגע בבשר הזב יכבס בגדיו!" אם הנוגע בו מטמא כלי שטף במגע, הוא עצמו לא יטמא כלי שטף במגע?! אם כן למה נאמר "וכל כלי עץ ישטף במים?" אלא אלו אוכלים ומשקים וכלים שעל גבי הזב.

זה דבר שאין צריך לומר שכבר באר שאדם הנוגע בזב מטמא כלים כמ"ש "וכבס בגדיו" וכל שכן הזב עצמו. ופירשו ר' שמעון שקאי על הכלים ואוכלים ומשקים שעל גבי הזב אף על גב שלא נגעו בזב

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Another Tannaitic (early rabbinic) text that relates to this situation, including drinks, is the following (Mishnah *Zavim* 4:6):



There is a greater stringency in the case of a corpse than a man who has had an abnormal seminal emission. For, whereas the man who has had an abnormal seminal emission defiles all objects on which he sits or lies upon, so that these likewise convey impurity to people and garments, and he conveys to what is above him impurity through indirect contact by breathing, so that these, in turn, defile food and beverages, whereas in the case of a corpse, no such uncleanness is conveyed. Greater stringency is also found in the case of a corpse, since it can convey impurity by overshadowing, and it defiles seven days' defilement, whereas in the case of a man who has had an abnormal seminal emission, no such impurity is conveyed.

חמר בַּמַּת מְבַזְבֵּז, שֶׁהֵזַב עוֹשֶׂה מִשְׁכָּב וּמוֹשֵׁב מִתְחַתּוֹ לְטֵמֵא אָדָם, וְלְטֵמֵא בְּגָדִים, וְעַל גְּבוּי מִדֶּף לְטֵמֵא אֶקְלִין וּמִשְׁקִין, מֵה שְׂאֵין הַמַּת מְטַמֵּא. חֲמַר בַּמַּת, שֶׁהֵמַת מְטַמֵּא בְּאֵהֶל וּמְטַמֵּא טַמְאָת שְׁבַעֲהָ, מֵה שְׂאֵין הֵזַב מְטַמֵּא

While one might think that items that become impure can be purified, yet we read elsewhere in the Mishnah (*Makhshirin* 4:8):

Water does not purify other beverages.

This is reminiscent of another text from the Mishnah regarding drinking impure beverages (*Mikva'ot* 10:8):

If one drank impure beverages and then one immersed and then vomited them up, the beverages are still impure because they did not become pure in the body. If one drank unclean water and immersed and then vomited it up, it is clean because it became purified within the body.

שֶׁתֵּה מִשְׁקִים טַמְאִים, טָבַל וְהִקְיֵאֵן, טַמְאִים, מִפְּנֵי שְׂאֵינָן טְהוּרִים בְּגוּף. שֶׁתֵּה מִים טַמְאִים, טָבַל וְהִקְיֵאֵם, טְהוּרִים, מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵם טְהוּרִים בְּגוּף

Ultimately, though, what does it matter when one consumes impure beverages or pure beverages? A consequence of these beverages becoming impure is what it can do to one who drinks them, as we read elsewhere in the Mishnah (*Mishnah Zavim* 5:12):

The following disqualify *terumah*:...one who drinks impure beverages....

Rabbi Obadiah ben Abraham of Bertinoro (1445-1515) helpfully provides an explanation of this Mishnah, sharing (commentary on the Mishnah, SV וְהוֹשֵׁתָהּ מִשְׁקִים טַמְאִים):

The Sages said that a person in this situation is treated as having a secondary level of ritual impurity (meaning: not fully impure, but impure enough to affect certain sacred items), and as a result, one can invalidate *terumah* (food set aside for priests that must remain ritually pure). And the reason why the Rabbis make this decree in these cases is that, sometimes, when

נִעֲשֶׂה גַם כֵּן שְׂנִי לְטַמְאָה וּפּוֹסֵל אֶת הַתְּרוּמָה. וְטַעֲמָא דְגִזְזֵר רַבְּנָן בְּרַבְּנֵי,



### Remaining in the Belly

As a fetus already begins drinking what its mother drinks while in its mother's belly, it is also impressive that it is able to remain in her belly (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14:3):

Rabbi Taḥlifa of Caesarea said: "If a person eats one portion of food after another portion of food, does not the second portion expel the first? But no matter how much food a woman eats or how many beverages she drinks, the fetus is not expelled - is this not 'life and lovingkindness'?"

אָמַר רַבִּי תַחְלִיפָא דְקַסְרְיָא אַם אֵכַל אֶדָם פְּרוּסָה אַחַר פְּרוּסָה לֹא שְׂנִיָּה דְרוּחָה אֶת הָרַאשׁוֹנָה, הָאֲשֶׁה הוּוּ כְּמָה מְאָכַל הִיא אוֹקְלֵת וְכַמָּה מִשְׁקִים הִיא שׁוֹתָה וְאִינוּ דְרוּחָה הֵלֵךְ, אִין זֶה חַיִּים וְחֶסֶד

A helpful explanation to the beginning of this statement is Rabbi Hēnoch Zundel ben Joseph (d. 1867), who wrote (ד"ה א"ב, ד"ה א"ב) וְיֹסֵף עַל וִיקְרָא רַבֵּה י"ד:ג, ד"ה א"ב) וְאוֹכַל אָדָם

When a person eats, even though the food goes to the stomach and intestines, and the fetus is in the womb, nevertheless, because the woman is upright, the weight of the stomach would press against the womb and push the fetus - if not for the providence of God.

וְאִף שֶׁהַמֵּאכֵל הוֹלֵךְ אֶל הָאִיִּצְטוּמָכָא וּבְנֵי מַעִים. וְהוֹלֵךְ בְּרַחֲם. מ"מ ע"י שֶׁהָאִשָּׁה זְקוּפָה כּוֹבֵד הָאִיִּצְטוּמָכָא הִיא דְרוּחָה אֶת הָרַחֵם וְדוּחָה הוֹלֵךְ לֹולֵ' הַשְּׂגַחַת ה'

### Post-Fetal Drinking

While gestational drinking has been the focus so far, there is also a midrash that describes the transition for providing for a fetus that then becomes a newborn (*Vayikra Rabbah* 14:3):

Rabbi Meir said: "All nine months that a woman does not see blood, she really should have seen it. What did The Holy Blessed One do? He removed (the blood) upward to her breasts and made it milk, so that when the baby was born there, food would be for him to eat. Even more so if it was a male child, as it says: 'When a woman conceives and gives birth to a male'."

אָמַר רַבִּי מֵאִיר כָּל תִּשְׁעָה חֳדָשִׁים שְׂאֵין הָאִשָּׁה רוֹאֶה דָם בְּדִין הוּא שֶׁתֵּהָא רוֹאֶה, מֵה הִקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹשֶׂה מִסְלִקוֹ לְמַעְלָה לְדִדְיָה וְעוֹשֶׂהוּ חֵלֶב, כְּדִי שְׂיֵצֵא הַלֵּלֵד וְיִהְיֶה לוֹ מִזוֹן לְאֹכֵל, וְבוֹיֹתֵר אִם הִיא זָכָר, שְׂנֵאֲמַר: אִשָּׁה כִּי תִרְעֶ וְיִלְדֶה זָכָר

In Rabbi Meir's description, instead of witnessing uterine blood, it transforms into the beverage of milk for her fetus to drink - one liquid is being transformed into a liquid/beverage of life.

### Conclusion

Taken together, these rabbinic midrashim point to not only drinking as something that happens ex utero, but even in utero. Thus, it seems that the rabbis are pointing out drinking as a continual life-giving behavior, especially as we are developing in utero, preparing us for the post-gestational world. May all of our drinking provide us nourishment and life.

### L'chaim

someone is eating, they are eating impure foods, and while that impure food is still in one's mouth, one might put *terumah* beverages into one's mouth, causing the sacred liquid to become invalid. And similarly, sometimes a person might drink impure beverages, and - while it is still in one's mouth - one might put *terumah* food into one's mouth, again causing the sacred food to become invalid.

דְּזַמְנִין דְּאֵכִיל אֶכְלִים טַמְאִים, וְשָׂדִי מִשְׁקִים דְּתְרוּמָה בְּפִמְיָה בְּעוֹד שֶׁהָאֶכְלִים טַמְאִים בְּפִיו, וּפְסִיל לְהוּ. וְכֵן נִמְי וְזַמְנִין דְּשִׁתִּי מִשְׁקִין טַמְאִין, וְשָׂדִי אֶכְלִים דְּתְרוּמָה בְּפִמְיָה בְּעוֹדֵן בְּפִיו, וּפְסִיל לְהוּ

Although we do not currently operate within a lifestyle that works with *terumah* or purity/impurity, these are certainly some interesting considerations regarding impure beverages. May we only drink pure beverages!

### L'chaim

