

ONEG SHABBAS

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

Blessings & Punishments Through Wine

In this week's Torah portion, we read of the song that God had commanded Moses to (Deut. 31:19):

teach it to the people of Israel; put it in
their mouths, in order that this poem
may be My witness for the people of
Israel.

לְמַדָּה אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמְרָה
בְּפִיהֶם לְמַעַן תִּהְיֶה־לִּי
הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לְעֵד בְּבְנֵי
יִשְׂרָאֵל

In describing this song, which has become known as Ha'azinu for its opening word, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270) (popularly known as Ramban) wrote (ד"ה וְעַתָּה כָּתְבוּ לָכֶם אֶת הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת):

It is called "a song" because Israel would
recite it with singing and melodies. It was
also written in the style of a song, since
songs are written with interruptions,
indicating the places of chanting.

וְיִקְרָאָהּ שִׁירָה כִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל
יִאמְרוּהָ תְּמִיד בְּשִׁיר וּבְזִמְרָה,
וְכֵן נִכְתְּבָה כְּשִׁירָה, כִּי
הַשִּׁירִים יִכְתְּבוּ בָהֶם הַפְּסָק
בְּמִקְוֹמוֹת הַנְּעִימָה

Throughout this song, we read of several references to wine and drinking. What are they, and what do they tell us about good times and bad times, as reflected through wine?

Drinking the Blood of Grapes for Wine

The first of these mentions occurs during the first half of this poem, as described by two-time guest of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, Dr. Rabbi Zev Farber, who wrote: "The first half of *Ha'azinu* is relatively straightforward: When the nations were being given their territories, [God] chose Israel to be His people (vv. 8-9). In fact, He had found them in a wasteland and brought them to His own lush land (vv. 10-14)" (*"Ha'azinu: The Song's Enigmatic Climax"*). At the conclusion of this being in a lush land, we read that the song includes that the Jews (Deut. 32:14):

Drank the blood of grapes for wine.

What does this wine reference mean? Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known as Rashi) described this verse as saying (רש"י על דברים) (ל"ב:י"ד, ד"ה ודם ענב):

"Wine" in Aramaic is חמר. This is not the
name of an actual substance, but rather a
term of praise for its taste — like *vinous* in
French.

יין בלשון אַרמִי "חמר",
אין זה שם דבר אלא לשון
משבח בטעם, ווי"נוש
בלעז.

Rashi further wrote on this verse, describing this wine word (רש"י על דברים) (ל"ב:י"ד, ד"ה חמר):

You shall drink good wine, and taste
wine of a fine and good quality.

תִּהְיֶה שׁוֹתָה יין טוֹב וְטוֹעֵם יין
חָשׁוּב

In addition to Rashi having mentioned a high quality of wine, Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) described this wine blessing as a high quantity of wine (אבן עזרא על דברים ל"ב:י"ד, ד"ה תשתה):

The meaning is, as if speaking to a friend: "It
is so abundant that you will drink wine at all
times."

והטעם כמדבר לחבירו
כל כך הוא רב שתשת
חמר בכל עת

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Yom Kippur Through the Rabbinic Drinking Glass

Abstaining from Drinking as an Affliction

Amongst all the days of the year, the only one that the Torah outright forbids drinking on is that of Yom Kippur. While the language used does not specify withholding drinking - עניתם "shall afflict yourselves" (Lev. 23:27, Lev. 23:32, & Num. 29:7), our sages make it clear that one of the key ways with which we afflict our bodies is through not drinking (Mishnah Yoma 8:1):

Yom Kippur is forbidden in eating,
drinking, in bathing, and in smearing [oil],
in wearing shoes, and in conjugal
relations.

יום הכפּוּרִים אָסוּר בְּאֵכִילָה
וּבִשְׁתִּיָּה וּבְרִחִיצָה וּבְסִיכָה
וּבְנִיעוּלַת הַסָּדֵל וּבִתְשׁוּמֵי
הַמָּטָה.

In considering whence these derive, we read of the following third-century rabbis considering these (Yoma 76a):

To what do these five afflictions correspond?
Rav Hisda said: "They are based on the five
times [that the] afflictions [of Yom Kippur are
mentioned] in the Torah:

'And on the tenth' (Num. 29:7),
'But on the tenth' (Lev. 23:27),
'a Shabbat of solemn rest' (Lev. 23:32),
'It is a Shabbat of solemn rest' (Lev. 16:31),
and 'And it shall be for you' (Lev. 16:29)."

Are these only five? There are six that were
taught in the Mishnah!

Drinking is included with eating, as Resh
Lakish said: "Whence do we derive that
drinking is included in the concept of eating?
As it is stated: 'And you shall eat before the
Lord your God...the tithe of your grain, your
wine, and your oil' (Deut. 14:23) - *tirosh* is
wine, but it calls [the action of consuming it
as] 'and you shall eat'."

הני חמשה ענייין כנגד
מי?
אמר רב חסדא: כנגד
חמשה ענייין שבטורה:
"ובעשור",
ו"אך בעשור",
"שבת שבתון",
ו"שבת שבתון",
ו"היתה לכם".

הני חמשה הוו? ואנן
שיתא תנן!
שתיה בכלל אכילה
היא. דאמר ריש לקיש:
מנין לשתיה שהיא
בכלל אכילה, שנאמר:
"ואכלת לפני ה' אלהיך
מעשר דגנך תירושך
ויצהרך, תירוש חמר
הוא, וקרי ליה 'ואכלת'."

While the number five is an easier number of afflictions to remember than six, Resh Lakish (200-275 CE), teaches here that drinking is subsumed under eating, highlighting how rabbinic interpretation can treat distinct physical acts as one legal prohibition when the Torah frames them under a single linguistic umbrella.

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Heimish Humor
@HeimishHumor

"Jews have six fast days a year? So you
must be a pretty trim and fit people."

"Ohhh, no...no no no no."

3:14 PM · 21 Sep 23

Oneg Shabbas is composed by, edited by, and published by Rabbi Drew Kaplan.

If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, feel free to reach out at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

{Yom Kippur, continued from previous page}

Rabbinic Minimum Measurement for Culpability

Instead of saying that drinking anything is outright forbidden, the rabbis provide a minimum measurement for which one is culpable of consumption (Mishnah Yoma 8:2):

One who eats a large date-bulk and its pit, or one who **drinks** enough to fill one's cheeks is liable.
All foods join together to make a date-bulk, and all liquids join together to make the volume of filling one's cheeks.
One who eats and **drinks**, these quantities do not combine.

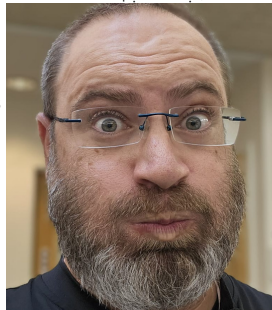
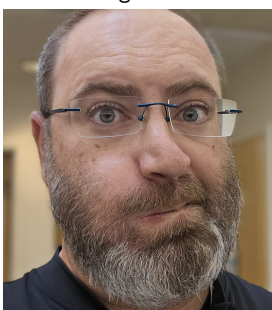
האוכל ככותבת הגסה, כמוה וכגרעין, והשונה מלא לגמיו, חיב. כל האכלין מצטרפין לככותבת. כל המשקין מצטרפין למלא לגמיו. האוכל ושונה, אין מצטרפין

While the Mishnah clearly states that one is only culpable once their cheeks are full of beverage(s), a rabbinic opinion is published in the third century that minimizes this quantity (Yoma 80a):

Rav Yehudah said: "Shmuel said: 'This does not mean two cheeks actually full. Rather, if one pushes the drink to one side of his mouth, and it appears as though his cheek were full.'"

אמר רב יהודה אמר שמואל: לא מלא לוגמיו ממש, אלא כל שאילו יסלקנו לצד אחד ויראה כמלא לוגמיו

{Photo caption: the picture on the right is of an individual with a cheeksfull quantity, as reflected in the Mishnah, whereas the picture on the left is of an individual with only a cheekfull, reflecting Shmuel's opinion, as quoted by Rav Yehudah.}



In this minimizing, Shmuel has now made the culpability minimum to only filling one of a person's cheeks with a beverage(s), perhaps a multiplicity of small sips. Later on in the third century, a rabbi seems to have a problem with these differing standards of measurements, which is met with a response from a turn-of-the-fourth century rabbinic leader (Yoma 80b):

Rabbi Zeira objected strongly to this quantity: "Why is there a difference with eating that there is one standard measurement for everyone, versus **drinking** where everyone has their own relative measurement?"
Abayyé said to him: "The sages have a tradition with the volume of the large date, that this amount settles one's mind, but less than this amount does not settle one's mind. With drinking, one's mind is settled with one's own cheekful, but one's mind is not settled with someone else's cheekful."

מתקיף לה רבי זירא: מאי שנא אכילה, דכל חד וחד – בככותבת, ומאי שנא שתיה, דכל חד וחד בדידה? אמר ליה אבוי: קים להו לרבנן בככותבת, דבהכי מיתבא דעתיה, בציר מהכי – לא מיתבא. בשתיה, בדידה, מיתבא דעתיה, בדהכריה – לא מיתבא דעתיה

Temporal Quantification of Drinking

This amount of beverage-consumption is ratified in post-Talmudic literature (cf. שולחן ערוך, אורח חיים תרי"ב: טי), although another aspect to consider is that of timing, as we read elsewhere in what Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) wrote in his Set Table (אורח חיים תרי"ב: יי):

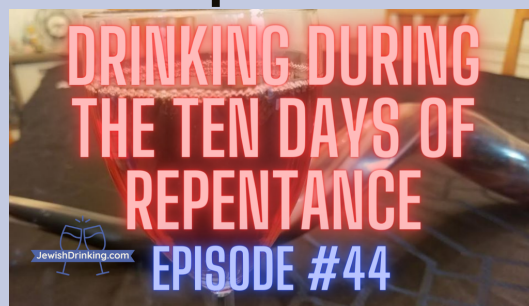
One who drinks a little and drinks (again) if there is from the beginning of the first drinking until the end of the last drinking the amount of time needed to drink a quarter of a log, they are combined to the stated measure (i.e., he is guilty of punishment), but (if it takes longer) they

שתה מעט וחזר ושתה אם יש מתחלת שתיה ראשונה עד סוף שתיה אחרונה כדי שתיית רביעית מצטרפין לכשישור



Related Episode

A related episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* is the 44th episode on the topic of Drinking During the Ten Days of Repentance, which includes not only drinking on Rosh HaShanah, but also throughout the rest of the days up through Yom Kippur (and beyond).



In addition to being on YouTube and podcast players, you can also find it at

JewishDrinking.com/10DaysIntro



are not combined. There are those who say that the measure of time that combines the drinkings is the time needed to eat a half a loaf of bread, just as is the case with the combination of different foods.

ואם לאו אין מצטרפין ויש אומרים ששיעור צירוף השתיות כדי אכילת פרס כמו צירוף אכילות

In this consideration, the amount of drinking that triggers culpability is not an absolute amount of simply this cheekful for the entire duration of Yom Kippur, but, rather, it is only for a limited amount of time. How much this amount of time it takes to drink this amount is debatable (something covered in our run up to Passover), although it seems to be a matter of minutes. Thus, if one were, for whatever reason, to drink a small amount of water that is less than a cheekful at one point in the day and then an hour or so later drinking another less than a cheekful, it would not seem to trigger culpability for this person.

Yom Kippur's Departure

While we avoid drinking (and eating) throughout Yom Kippur, when it comes time to officially mark its conclusion, we ritually conclude the holiday with Havdallah, with our first consumptive act to be carried out over wine (although I've also seen beer used) (ש"ע או"ח תרכ"ד: ג):

One says Havdalah over the cup [of wine], but one does not say the blessing over the spices even if it (Yom Kippur) falls on Shabbat.

מבדילים על הכוס ואין מברכים על הבשמים אפי' אם חל להיות בשבת

Following this first consumptive act to be made upon wine, this need not conclude our consumption post-fast. Indeed, Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1530-1572) wrote that our post-Yom Kippur behavior is to include celebratory consumption (מפה לש"ע או"ח תרכ"ד: ה):

We eat and rejoice upon the departure of Yom Kippur, since it's sort of a holiday.

אוכלים ושמחים במוצאי יום כיפורים דהוי קצת יום טוב

While the word Rabbi Isserles uses is שמחים "we rejoice", I cannot help but think he uses that word to also include celebrating over further drinking beyond wine for havdalah. Indeed, previously, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340) more clearly stated the notion of drinking post-Yom Kippur (טור או"ח תרכ"ד):

And they eat and drink in joy, as it is written: "Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a good heart..." (Eccl. 9:7).

ואוכלין ושותין בשמחה וכתוב לך אכול בשמחה לחמך ושתה בלב טוב יינך וגו'

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{Blessings & Punishments, continued from page 1}

Building off of ibn Ezra's notion of an abundant quantity of grapes [that would yield wine], Rabbi Ovadia ben Jacob Sforno (1475-1549) (popularly known as Sforno) described the abundance of grapes/wine they would have as involving a fantastic ratio of yield versus energy/labor put into growing these grapes (מ"ה דם ענב תשתה חמר, ספורנו על דברים ל"ב:י"ד, ד"ה ודם ענב תשתה חמר):

The juice of the grapes was fit to drink with little labor involved, and thus they were sustained without hardship. All of this the Almighty, blessed be He, provided for them so that they would have free time to engage in Torah and mitzvot.

This is certainly quite the blessing for the Israelites in the good times, although they unfortunately turned away (Deut. 31:16, 31:20-21, and 31:29). This leads to bad times, including punishments. After this verse, there is a change in what takes place, as Rabbi Dr. Farber continues (ibid.):

Vv. 26-27 reflect a turning point: [God] worries that if he simply allows Israel to be destroyed by their enemies, the enemies will believe it was their own might that accomplished the feat. [God] amazes at the foolishness of this view, but still remains concerned that they will think it (vv. 28-31). [God] then appears to reflect on the terrible punishment he has in store for the enemies who destroyed his people and speak so arrogantly about themselves and their gods (vv. 32-35).

So what are these punishments?

Wine & Drinking Punishment

As part of the punishments, there are punishments involving - you guessed it - wine & drinking (Deut. 32:32-33):

But their vine is from the vine of Sodom and the shoot of Gomorrah. Their grapes are poison grapes; their grape cluster is bitterness to them. Their vine is serpents' venom, like the poison of the dreadful cobra.

What stands out in these verses is that whereas one normally experiences grapes as being sweet, here, there is only bitterness to be experienced; and where wine is usually associated with living and life (l'chaim!), here, the grapes are *poisonous*, resulting in life's opposite: death. In describing what is going on here, Prof. John Anthony Dunne writes (*The Mountains Shall Drip Sweet Wine: A Biblical Theology of Alcohol* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2025), 166):

In this song, the enemies of God are described as having vines from Sodom and Gomorrah, which bring forth poisonous and bitter grapes that produce wine like snake venom (Deut 32:32-33). After this description, God asks the rhetorical question, "Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults?" (32:34). What is reserved and sealed away must be the poisonous wine, suggesting that he intends to use it to mete out judgment. The very next verse describes how God will repay and avenge, suggesting that the poisonous wine is the means of doing so (32:35).

Clearly we have here in Deuteronomy 32 an image of God using poisoned wine to enact judgment.



The result of this inverse poetry is a deadly result from where one would expect sweetness, life, and enjoyment. However, who will be doing this drinking? While it might be considered that it's the Israelites', since they are not properly behaving, could it, however, be the non-Israelite nations?

New Episode

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* is about the Best-in-Show winning products and their distilleries at the inaugural Kosher Spirits Awards, the first kosher-certified spirits competition, which took place just this summer. This episode features visits to each of the three distilleries.



In addition to being on YouTube and podcast players, you can also find it at

JewishDrinking.com/KSA2026BIS



Opposing Perspectives in the Midrash

It turns out that both answers are reflected in midrash, as we read of opposing opinions amongst a couple of second century rabbis (*Sifrei Devarim* 322:28):

Rabbi Yehudah expounded it in connection with Israel; Rabbi Nehemiah expounded it in connection with the nations.

Rabbi Yehudah expounded it in connection with Israel: "Israel has lost good counsel that was given to them, and there is no counsel except for Torah, as it is said: 'With me (Torah) is counsel and wisdom' (Prov. 8:14)."

Rabbi Nehemiah expounded it in connection with the nations: "The nations have lost the seven mitzvot that I gave them."

ר' יהודה דורשם כלי ישראל, ר' נחמיה דורשם כלי האומות רבי יהודה דורשו כלי ישראל איבדו ישראל עצה טובה שנתנה להם, ואין עצה אלא תורה שנאמר (משלי ח יד) לי עצה ותושיה. רבי נחמיה דורשו כלי האומות איבדו האומות שבע מצוות שנתתי להם

Rabbi Yehudah suggests that these verses are referring to Israel, while Rabbi Nehemiah claims it is referring to other nations, which leads to subsequent rabbis being divided on this matter.

Medieval Commentators

Moving into the Medieval era, the commentators are divided, with Rashi, Rabbi ibn Ezra, Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270) (popularly known as Ramban), and others following Rabbi Nehemiah, while Sforno and Rabbi Hekziah ben Manoah (1250-1310) (popularly known as Hizkuni) seem to follow Rabbi Yehudah.



Owing to the poetic style of the language, a lot of questions arise, first of which is why the reference to Sedom and Gemorrah? According to Rashi, it is on account that their behaviors are as the behaviors of Sodom and Gemorrah (רש"י על דברים ל"ב:י"ב, ד"ה כי מגפן סדם גפנם):

This is to be connected with what is stated above: "I said in My heart, I would scatter them into corners and make the remembrance of them cease..." (Deut. 32:26) because their behaviors are like the behaviors of Sedom and Gomorrah.

מוסב למעלה – אמרתי בלבי אפאיהם ואשבית זכרם לפי שמעשיהם מעשי סדום ועמורה

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{Blessings & Punishments, continued from page 3}

This connection is a pretty direct one, with Rashi's grandson, Rabbi Samuel ben Meir (1085-1158) (popularly known as Rashbam), explaining (רשב"ם על דברים ל"ב: ד"ה כי מגפן סדום גפנם):

If not for the boast of the gentile nations that they should have drunk from the vine of Sedom according to the appropriate judgment that not even the memory of neither Sedom nor Gomorrah would have remained, since "they sinned like Sedom and Gomorrah", as it is written, "They avow their sins like Sodom" (Is. 3:9), "chieftains of Sedom...people of Gomorrah" (Is. 1:10).	אם לא מפני גאות האומות שהם מגפן סדום, היה להם לשנות מן הדין שלא יסאר מהם זכר כסדום ועמורה, שהרי חטאו כסדום ועמורה, כדכתיב: וחסאם כסדום הגידו. קציני סדום עם עמורה
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On the other side, however, is Sforno, who described this verse in line with Rabbi Yehudah's opinion (ד"ה ענבמו ענבי רש) (ספורנו על דברים ל"ב: ד"ה ענבמו ענבי רש):

Grapes sprouted forth from this vine, which are poison for them. This is a simile for the evil deeds committed by the Jewish people which backfired. The sins singled out are those of a social, rather than a theological nature, as pointed out by Ezekiel.	ומזה הגפן יצמחו אצלם ענבי רש שהם מעשים רעים ומזיקים לבריות והם בהשתדלם לשים עיניהם ולבם על בצעם ועל דם הנקי לשפוך
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Medieval commentators split in their readings like the rabbis of the second century, whether those siding with Rabbi Neḥemiah, describing Israel as a vine gone wild, bearing the same bitter fruit as Sodom and Gomorrah, versus those following Rabbi Yehudah, seeing the people's sins as grapes turned sour - social and ethical failings that poisoned the vintage. In both views, Sodom and Gomorrah provide the template: a vineyard spoiled, whose grapes serve as a sharp reminder of how corruption can taint the whole harvest.

Drunken Arrows

The final drinking reference is not to wine, but to drunkenness, which makes it the final mention of drunkenness in the Torah (Deut. 32:42):

I will make My arrows drunk with blood— As My sword devours flesh— Blood of the slain and the captive From the long-haired enemy chiefs.	אשכיר חצי מדם וחרבי תאכל בשר מדם חלל ושבוי מראש פרעות אויב
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While it is hard for any reader of this verse to consider the arrows literally getting drunk, what then might it mean? Rabbi Yoseph ben Yitzhak Bekhor Shor of Orléans (12th century) describes (ד"ה אשכיר) (חצי מדם):

The arrows will spill the blood of the enemies to drunkenness.	שונאיהם שישפכו חצי דם האויבים לשכרון
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A further articulation of this description is provided by Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855), who describes this arrow-drunkenness as follows (ביאור יש"ר על התורה, דברים ל"ב: ד"ה אשכיר חצי מדם):

The song's poetic manner is that the arrows will drink the blood of the enemy until the arrows get drunk, which is a parable about the magnitude of revenge and its exaggeration.	דרך מליצת השיר, חצי ישתו דם האויב עד שישכרו, והוא משל על גודל הנקמה והפלגתה
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In sum, this approach considers the metaphorical language of the arrows consuming so much blood from Israel's enemies that, as if the blood - in its reddishness, which poetically seems like wine - were wine, resulting in the arrows getting drunk off of all of the blood they experience. This yields a very successful military campaign against Israel's enemies.



{Yom Kippur, continued from page 2}

Rabbi Eliyahu Spira (1660-1712) writes that it derives from Rabbi Jacob ben Judah Weil (1380-1460), who wrote that there was a midrash about this moment (אליה רבה או"ח תרכ"ד:):

Rabbi Jacob ben Judah Weil wrote that there is a midrash that a Divine echo says: "Go eat...".	ומהרי"ו כתב דאיתא במדרש בת קול אומרת לך אכול וכו'
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Perhaps, this text is pointing to how spiritually charged this moment of Yom Kippur's departure is...and how it's an opportunity to celebrate, including by drinking.

Conclusion

While there is a severity to our drinking even a cheekful of beverages for the duration of Yom Kippur, this day seems to stand out amongst our calendar, as it is sandwiched between drinking. Indeed, it is considered a mitzvah to eat and drink on erev yom Kippur, including eating more (SA OH 604:1). Moreover, as opposed to erev Tisha b'av, there is no prohibition against consuming alcoholic beverages (although I do not know if it is a good idea to do so). Nevertheless, one should stop their eating and drinking with time to go before Yom Kippur in order to add holy time to their non-holy time (SA OH 608:2).

This ultimately results in is this single day that is devoid of drinking (and eating), amongst other activities, yet notably bounded by drinking on both ends. Of course, there are certain exceptions, including utilizing the minimum amount of beverage loophole the rabbis created, should one need (although one should consult one's rabbi for such circumstances). All of this boils down to a day devoid of drinking in order to achieve a cleansing of our sins (cf. Lev. 23:28), amongst other behaviors. May we withhold our drinking on Yom Kippur to enjoy more l'chaims. Wishing you a meaningful fast.

L'chaim 

Midrashic Perspective

An entirely different perspective, however, is provided in a midrash (Sifrei Devarim 332:42):

How is it possible to make arrows drunk from blood? (The meaning is) rather: "I shall make others drunk with what My arrows do."	וכי איפשר להם לחצים שישתכרו מדם אלא הריני משכיר את אחרים ממה שחצי עושים
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In this approach, the composer of this midrash is not satisfied with considering this verse in a poetic manner, preferring to consider that there really is drunkenness that is to take place, yet arrows - as inanimate objects - cannot *actually* get drunk. In so doing, he considers the arrows' actions as inflicting so much killing as to drive others - perhaps friends or allies of those slain - to drink so much to cope with these losses that they get drunk. This is certainly an incredibly clever perspective on this poetic language that the arrows still remain non-consuming, yet drunkenness results from their successful actions.

Conclusion

In considering the final song of the Torah, while we might have expected one reference to drinking, it is certainly something for readers of this publication to appreciate that there are multiple references to the joy and bounty of drinking wine, as well as its poetic inverse, the poisonous grapes, whether for misbehaving Israel or for the gentile nations. Finally, the poetic language of drunken arrows is either a metaphor for the arrows being engulfed in blood or for causing others to drown their sorrows, having seen so many arrows driven into their erstwhile allies. One cannot also help but consider that with this song being intended to be placed into our mouths, as mentioned at the outset, there is a mixing of song and wine. This seems to be no mere accident, but poetic cleverness.

L'chaim 