

ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

פרשת נצבים-וילך - 4-5 September 2026 Volume 5, Issue 46 - כ"ג אלול תשפ"ו

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

The Drunk and the Thirsty

Towards the outset of this week's Torah portion, we encounter a curious phrase, as part of a passage regarding people looking to abandon The LORD in favor of other gods (Deuteronomy 29:19-20):

When hearing these words, they may imagine a special immunity, thinking, "I shall be safe, though I follow my own willful heart" – thus adding the drunk to the thirsty. The LORD will never forgive that person. Rather, The LORD's anger and passion will rage against them, until every sanction recorded in this book comes down upon them, and The LORD blots out their name from under heaven.

וְהָיָה בְשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת־דְּבָרִי הָאֵלֹהִים הַזֶּה וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם יְהוָה לִי כִּי בִשְׂרָרִית לִבִּי לִמְעַן סְפוֹת הָרָחֵק אֶת־הַצִּמְאָה: לֹא־יֵאבֶקֶה ה' סֶלַח לוֹ כִּי אִזּוֹ יַעֲשֶׂן אֶפְרָה' וְקִנְאָתוֹ בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וְרִבְצָה בּוֹ כָּל־הָאֵלֶּה הַכְּתוּבָה בְּסֵפֶר הַזֶּה וּמִחַה ה' אֶת־שְׁמוֹ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם ה'



Rashi's Explanation

This phrase of "adding the drunk to the thirsty" is certainly a curious one, especially as we read the explanation by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known as Rashi), who wrote (ד"ה הורה) (רש"י על דברים כ"ט:י"ח, ד"ה הורה):

Unintentionally - that he acts like a drunk person, who does things without awareness.

שוגג, שהוא עושה כאדם שכור שהוא עושה שלא מדעת

As to the thirsty person, Rashi describes as follows (ד"ה) (הצמאה):

That he is doing so knowingly and with desire.

שהוא עושה מדעת ובתאוה

So, this line of adding the drunk to the thirsty, in Rashi's words, are adding those who are committing these sins accidentally [like a drunk person] to those who are committing such sins knowingly.

This imagery of this description is certainly interesting to readers of this publication to consider a drunk person in this metaphor. This fits into the broader sense of these verses in the following fashion, as described by Rashi (רש"י על דברים כ"ט:י"ח, ד"ה למען ספות הורה):

Because I will add punishments to him for what he has done until now unintentionally, and I would have otherwise passed over them; but he is now causing Me to combine them with the intentional sins, and I will exact retribution from him for everything. And so did Onkelos translate: "in order to add upon him the sins committed in error to those done intentionally" – that I will add the inadvertent sins to the deliberate ones.

לפי שאוסף לו פרענות על מה שעשה עד הנה בשוגג, והייתי מעביר עליהם, וגורם עתה שאצטרף עם המזיד ואפרע ממנו הכל, וכן תרגם אנקלוס "בדיל לאוספא לה חטאי שלותא על דבנותא" – שאוסף לו אפי' השגגות על הדונות

Ibn Ezra's Explanation

A very different take is that articulated by Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) (popularly known as Ibn Ezra), who wrote (על אבן עזרא על) (דברים כ"ט:י"ח, ד"ה למען ספות):

Rabbi Yehudah HaLevi, may his soul be in Eden (1075-1141), said that the phrase "to sweep away" is like "to destroy" (cf. "Shall He indeed sweep away...?"). That is, the

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Celebrating *Hakhel*

In this week's parashah, we read the following (Deut 31:10-13):

And Moses instructed them as follows: Every seventh year, the year set for remission, at the Feast of Booths, (11) when all Israel comes to appear before The LORD, your God, in the place that [God] will choose, you shall read this Teaching aloud in the presence of all Israel. (12) Gather the people—men, women, children, and the strangers in your communities—that they may hear and so learn to revere The LORD, your God, and to observe faithfully every word of this Teaching. (13) Their children, too, who have not had the experience, shall hear and learn to revere The LORD, your God, as long as they live in the land that you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.

(ו) ויִצְוֶה מֹשֶׁה אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר מִקֵּץ | שְׁבַע שָׁנִים בְּמִעַד שְׁנַת הַשְּׁמִטָּה בְּחַג הַסֻּכּוֹת: (יא) בְּבֹאוֹ כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל לִרְאוֹת אֶת־פְּנֵי ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר תִּקְרָא אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת נֶגֶד כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּאַזְנֵיהֶם: (יב) הִקְהֵל אֶת־הָעָם הָאֲנָשִׁים וְהַנְּשִׁים וְהַטָּף וְגֵר אֲשֶׁר בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ לִמְעַן יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְעַן יִלְמְדוּ וְיִרְאוּ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֶיכֶם וְשָׁמְרוּ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת: (יג) וּבְנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדְעוּ יִשְׁמְעוּ וְלִמְדוּ לִירְאֶה אֶת־ה' אֱלֹהֶיכֶם כָּל־הַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם חַיִּים עַל־הָאָדָמָה אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עֹבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן שָׁמָּה לְרִשְׁתָּהּ



This ceremony, which is often simply called *Hakhel*, as described Prof. Aaron Demsky in his "Historical *Hakhel* Ceremonies and the Origin of Public Torah Reading" essay:

The opening word of this verse, *Hakhel* "gather," from the root *h.kh.l* meaning "congregation" or "gathering," gives the commandment its name and reflects its outlook nicely. This reading was not meant for priests, scribes or other initiated literati alone, as we would have expected in antiquity, but rather for the widest possible audience, without regard to status, gender or age.

While there is no aspect of this septennial occurrence that directly mentions drinking (or eating, for that matter), how can there be no such celebration? Perhaps one way we can think about *Hakhel* is to consider a

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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

{*Hakhel*, continued from previous page}

Biblical event that seems to be like *Hakhel*. Prof. Demsky continues in that essay to share the following:

The most elaborate *Hakhel*-like reading appears in the book of Nehemiah, and is significant not just as a possible example of this mitzvah, but because of its place in the history of public Torah reading, to this day, a key feature of the Jewish prayer service.

On the first of the seventh month, which, according to my chronology, came out in September 443 B.C.E at the end of a sabbatical year, throngs of people had congregated at the wide plaza at the eastern gate of the Temple compound for the traditional sacrificial service of the New Year that would be conducted by the priests and Levites. They requested that Ezra bring out the Torah and read it to them.

The public reading here resonates with the description of *hakhel* with its emphasis on Torah being read to the entire nation, even using the same root ל.ה.ק, albeit in noun form, as that of the verb *hakhel* (הקהל). And yet, the text does not explicitly say that it was being done in accordance with Deut 31. In addition, the description of the audience is slightly different.

Indeed, when we read of Ezra's *hakhel*-like ceremony, he instructed them to enjoyably eat and drink (Neh. 8:10):

He further said to them, "Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in The LORD is the source of your strength."	וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם לֵכוּ אֲכֹלוּ מִשְׂמְנִים וְשִׂתוּ מִמִּתְקִים וְשַׁלְחוּ מִנְתּוֹ לְאִין נִכּוֹן לֹא כִּי־קָדוֹשׁ הַיּוֹם לְאַדְמִינוּ וְאַל־תַּעֲצִבוּ כִּי־חֻדְדֵי ה' הֵיאֵךְ מִצְדָּכֶם
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We then read of them having done so (Neh. 8:12):

Then all the people went to eat and drink and send portions and make great merriment, for they understood the things they were told.	וַיֵּלְכוּ כָל־הָעָם לֶאֱכֹל וּלְשַׂתּוֹת וּלְשַׁלַּח מִנְתּוֹ וּלְעִשׂוֹת שִׂמְחָה גְדוֹלָה כִּי הִבִּינוּ בְּדִבְרֵים אֲשֶׁר הוֹדִיעוּ לָהֶם:
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What is going on here? Rabbi Levi ben Gershon (1288-1344) (popularly known as Ralbag) provides an insightful connection (ח"י, ד"ה) (לכ) אכלו משמנים

He said this regarding the joy of the holiday. And because the Torah commanded us in all our festival celebrations to bring joy to the destitute with all the good that God has given us, he commanded them to send portions to those who have nothing prepared, namely the poor. Furthermore, since they read from the Torah until midday, we learn from this that the festivals were given partly to gladden the soul - through the study of Torah - and partly to gladden the body, through indulging in delicious foods and sweet drinks .	אמר זה בעבור עונג יום טוב ובעבור שהתורה צותה לנו בכל שמחותינו בחגיגה לשמח האביונים בכל הטוב אשר נתן ה' לנו צוה אותם שישלחו מנות לאשר אין נכון ומזון והם העניים ולפי שעת חצי היום קראו בתורה למדנו מזה שהמועדים נתנו לשמח בקצתם הנפש והוא העסק בתורה ולשמח בקצתם הגוף והוא ההתענג במזונות ובמשקים הערבים
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So, when thinking about *hakhel*, this is an aspect to consider that otherwise might be overlooked. Indeed, I cannot imagine that, especially at this festive occasion, there would not be massive parties to eat and to drink following this gathering. When we consider the event in Ezra's ceremony, it seems that drinking, as well as eating, were certainly part of the experience.

L'chaim 

New Episode



The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* is now out, featuring David Harris and Dr. Megan Draheim, founders and owners of

Song Dog Farm Distillery, which only began operations within the past year, and is a fully kosher-certified operation.

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

{Drunk/Thirsty, continued from previous page}

one who blesses himself imagines that he can nullify the words of the righteous, who are alluded to by the term "the watered", as opposed to "the thirsty". Thus, he describes the righteous as "watered," like "a tree planted by streams of water," and the wicked as "thirsty," like "a destitute bush in the desert." He imagines that even his blessing in his heart will cut off the curse. This is a fine explanation - were it not for the fact that the word רוח is actually one of God's attributes. It would have been more fitting to say "the satiated with the thirsty."	שהוא כנוי במלת רוח עם דבר הצמח והנה כנה הצדיק ברוח. כמו כעץ שתול על מים. והרשע בצמאה כמו כערער בערבה. ויחשוב כי גם ברכתו בלבו תפסיק הקללה ויפיר לולא שמלת רוח תואר השם והיה ראוי להיות רווי את הצמא.
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... The metaphor of the righteous is "the watered," as in "a tree planted by streams of water," while the wicked is "the thirsty," as in "a destitute bush in the desert." The proof is that at the beginning it is written: "a root that bears gall and wormwood"—which is in the place of "the thirsty."	משל הצדיק ברוח כטעם כעץ שתול על פלגי מים והרשע בצמאה כטעם כערער בערבה והעד שכתוב בתחלה שרש פורה ראש ולענה והוא במקום צמא
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Conclusion

While Rashi understands this curious phrase through the imagery of drunkenness and thirst, Ibn Ezra's discussion takes us toward the contrasting images of flourishing trees and parched vegetation. For readers interested in drinking in Jewish texts, these interpretations offer a fascinating reminder that even an apparently explicit reference to drunkenness can yield very different understandings. Yet both readings return us to the troubling assumption at the heart of this passage: that someone can knowingly abandon The LORD while assuring themselves that all will be well. Whether we picture a person acting without awareness or a tree sustained by water, the passage challenges us to consider the difference between the reassurance we give ourselves and the choices for which we remain accountable.

L'chaim 

