

ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

ראש השנה - Volume 5, Issue 47 11-13 September 2026 - א'ב' תשרי תשפ"ז

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

Avraham's Great Drinking Party

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, we encounter something striking in the Torah reading: Avraham throws a really huge drinking party (Genesis 21:8):

The child grew up and was weaned, and Abraham held a great drinking party on the day that Isaac was weaned.

וַיִּגְדַּל הַיֵּלֶד וַיִּנְמַל וַיַּעַשׂ אַבְרָהָם מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹל בְּיוֹם הַנְּמֹל אֶת יִצְחָק

This is one of the five times we encounter the term *משתה* - a drinking party - recorded in the book of Genesis. Yet this is the only one of the five described in this particular way, as being "great". The others seemingly are run-of-the-mill drinking parties, but this one stands above them all: it is a *great* drinking party.

So what are we to make of this expression? What makes Avraham's drinking party so great?

Midrashic Views: Greatness of the Guests

The first place we might think to look is the Midrash. There, we encounter a fascinating explanation (Genesis Rabbah 53:10):

Rabbi Yudan bar Masparta said: "'The king made a great drinking party' (Esther 2:18) – the great leaders of the world were there. That is what is written: 'As the Lord will return to rejoice over you for good' (Deuteronomy 30:9) – in the days of Mordechai and Esther, 'as He rejoiced over your fathers' (Deuteronomy 30:9) – in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Simon said: "'A great drinking party' – a drinking party of all the great people; Og and all the great men were there."

רבי יודן בר מספרתא אמר (אסתר ב, יח): וַיַּעַשׂ הַמֶּלֶךְ מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹל, גָּדוֹל עוֹלָם הָיוּ שָׁם, הַדָּא הוּא דְכְּתִיב (דברים ל, ט): כִּי יֵשׁוּב ה' לָשׁוּב עֲלֶיךָ לטוב, בְּיָמֵי מָרְדֳּכַי וְאֶסְתֵּר, (דברים ל, ט): כְּאֲשֶׁר שָׂשׂ עַל אֲבוֹתֶיךָ, בְּיָמֵי אַבְרָהָם יִצְחָק וְיַעֲקֹב. אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בְּרַבִּי סִימוֹן מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹל, מִשְׁתֶּה גָדוֹלִים, עוֹג וְכָל גָּדוֹלִים עִמּוֹ הָיוּ שָׁם

Rosh HaShanah Through the Drinking Glass

When it comes to considering holidays through the perspective of drinking, Rosh HaShanah sticks out quite curiously. Indeed, while the other holidays are all considered *תגים* (festivals), only Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur remain. However, as Yom Kippur is the only Torah-mandated day to refrain from drinking, that leaves Rosh HaShanah in a category all on its own. So how do we consider Rosh HaShanah in the framework of holidays, and how does that affect it from the perspective of drinking?

Starting with the Torah to begin considering our behavior on Rosh

HaShanah, we read that *יְהִי לָכֶם שְׁבִתוֹן זְכָרוֹן תְּרוּעָה מְקֻרָא קֹדֶשׁ* "it shall be a rest day of blast-remembering, a sacred occasion" (Lev. 23:24) and *כָּל מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ* "you shall not do laborious work" (Lev. 23:25). We also similarly read *מְקֻרָא קֹדֶשׁ יְהִי לָכֶם כָּל־מְלָאכָת עֲבֹדָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ יוֹם תְּרוּעָה יְהִי לָכֶם* "It shall be a sacred occasion for you, you shall not work at your occupations, it shall be a blasting-day for you" (Num. 29:1). From these verses, Rosh HaShanah is not marked off by being a festival, but clearly a day free from labor.



Rabbinic Perspectives on Rosh HaShanah

So, how do the rabbis of the Talmud frame Rosh HaShanah? While the rabbis describe festivals to have rejoicing carried out on them to be done with wine (*Pesachim* 109a), Rosh HaShanah is notably not a festival, so it has no inherent quality of rejoicing. We read that one is not supposed to fast on Rosh HaShanah, as Rabbi Akiva clearly states in the second century (*yTa'anit* 3:3):

בראש השנה מתריעין אבל לא מתעניין
On Rosh HaShanah, we blast, but we do not fast.

The possibility of fasting is likely due to Rosh HaShanah being considered judgment day for everyone (Mishnah Rosh HaShanah 1:2):

בראש השנה כל באי העולם עוברים לפניו כבני מרון, שנאמר (תהלים לג) הַיֹּצֵר יְחַד לָבָם, הַמְבִּין אֶל כָּל מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם.
On Rosh Hashanah, all who enter the world pass before Him [to be judged] like a flock of sheep (or soldiers), as it is said: "He who fashions the hearts of them all, who understands all their deeds" (Psalms 33:15).



{continued on page 3}

{continued on the next page}

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

{Rosh HaShanah, continued from previous page}

Despite Rosh HaShanah serving as judgment day, a colorful description concerning the normative behavior expected on Rosh HaShanah is that described by a third-century sage (yRosh Hashanah 1:3):

Rabbi Hama, son of Rabbi Hanina, and Rabbi Hoshaya - One said, "Is there a nation like this nation? The common practice of the world is that someone who knows he is on trial wears black and wraps himself in black and lets his beard grow since he does not know how his trial will turn out. But that is not how it is with Israel. Rather, on the day of their trial, they wear white and shave their beards and eat, drink, and rejoice, for they know that the Holy One, blessed be He, does miracles for them."

ר' חמא בר' חנינה ור' הושעיה חד אמר אי זו אומה כאומה הזאת בנוהג שבעולם אדם יודע שיש לו דין לובש שחורים ומתעטף שחורים ומגדל זקנו שאינו יודע היאך דינו יוצא אבל ישראל אינן כן אלא לובשים לבנים ומתעטפין לבנים ומגלחין זקנם ואוכלין ושותין ושמים יודעין שהקב"ה עושה להן ניסים

This line of drinking (as well as eating and rejoicing) for the Jewish people know that the Holy One, blessed be He, does miracles for them is certainly an intriguing approach, clearly indicating that, by all rights, we should not continue to live, owing to our faults, yet, we will still endure, thus, we should celebrate by drinking, eating, and rejoicing.



Medieval Rabbinic Writings on Rosh HaShanah Drinking

Following in these footsteps a millennium later, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340) wrote (Tur OH 597):

We eat, drink, and are merry [on Rosh HaShanah], and it is forbidden to fast at all. ואוכלין ושותין ושמים ואין להתענות בו כלל

Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) further ratified this formulation of our normative consumptive behaviors on Rosh HaShanah, when he wrote (SA OH 597:1):

We eat, drink, and are happy [on Rosh HaShanah], and we fast neither on Rosh Hashanah nor on Repentance Shabbat. However, people should not eat to the fullness of their satiety so that they do not come to levity in order that there should be awe of the Lord upon their faces. אוכלים ושותים ושמים ואין מתעניין בראש השנה ולא בשבת שובה אמנם לא יאכלו כל שבעם למען לא יקלו ראשם ותהיה יראת ה' על פניהם

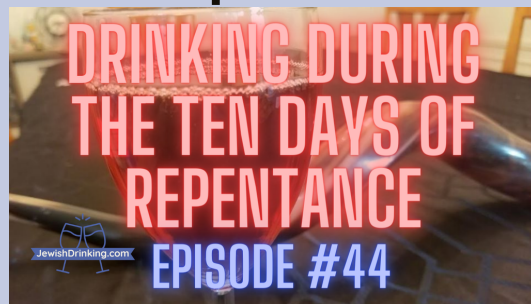
With this latter line, Rabbi Karo looks to balance this consumptive behavior, urging a limit to one's consumptive activities, but where does it come from? Elsewhere, he wrote (בית יוסף או"ח תקצ"ז):

I have found that Rabbi Alexander Süsslein HaKohen (d. 1349) wrote in his Collection Book that nonetheless, one should not eat one's fill, so that one does not act light-mindedly, and the fear of God should remain.... מצאתי כי בשם ספר אגודה אמנם האוכלים ב"ה לא יאכלו כל שבען למען לא יקילו ראשם ותהיה יראת ה' על פניהם



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



Clearly, Rabbi Karo sought out a balance between acting too seriously and acting not seriously enough with one's consumptive practices on Rosh HaShanah.

Considering Rosh HaShanah in Terms of Festiveness

Further amplifying Rabbi Caro's approach is Rabbi Yisrael Meir ha-Kohen Kagan (1838-1933), who described it as (משנה ברורה תקצ"זא):

Even though it is Judgement Day, nevertheless, there is a mitzvah of rejoicing on your holiday that is relevant to this day that it is also within the category of חג, as it is written, "Blast the horn at the new moon, at the full moon for our feast-day" (Ps. 81.4), and it is said in Nehemiah 8, "eat fatty foods and drink sweet drinks...for this day is holy unto our Lord; do not be sad, for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8.10).

אף שהוא יום הדין מכל מקום מצוה של ושמחת בחגך שייך גם בו שגם הוא בכלל חג כדכתיב תקעו בחודש שופר בכסה ליום חגנו ונאמר בנחמיה ח' אכלו משמנים ושתו ממתקים וגו' כי קדוש היום לאדונינו ואל תעצבו כי חדות ד' היא מעוזכם

While this last line is from the *hakhel* ceremony in Nehemiah, it took place on Rosh HaShanah, which helps serve as a model for drinking enjoyable beverages on Rosh HaShanah.

Conclusion

While Rosh HaShanah sticks out as the only non-festival holiday (aside from Yom Kippur) and it could be positioned merely as a sad day, owing to our being judged, yet, despite the medieval trend of seeking to fast, the overwhelming approach to our behavior on Rosh HaShanah has been the Talmudic approach of being different from other nations - not seeking to be sad on our judgment day, but to embrace it through eating, drinking, and enjoying what we are experiencing.

However, as opposed to a festival, such as Sukkot, in which we aspire to fully celebrate, rabbis have also sought to advise tempering it with some gravitas, so as not to get carried away with levity in our consumption. Ultimately, Rosh HaShanah is a day of balance: just as our lives are hanging in the balance, so, too, we should approach our consumption in a balanced fashion.

L'chaim 

Jewish Drinking, Inc. is a 501(c)3 initiative to educate about drinking in Jewish wisdom, tradition, history, practice, and more in order to enrich people's lives.

Tax-deductible donations made be contributed at JewishDrinking.com/Donate



{Avraham's Great Drinking Party continued from page 1}

For both of these rabbis, what made this drinking party so great was not necessarily its size or even the amount of alcoholic beverages present, but rather the greatness of its attendees. In other words, for both of these rabbis, it was not necessarily the quantity of the attendees that made the drinking party great, but the quality of the attendees.

This offers a fascinating and stark contrast from these rabbis: the greatness of a drinking party might be measured not by how many people show up, how much is served, or how lavish the affair is, but by who is there.

When Great People Make a Gathering Great

We can perhaps appreciate the Midrash's insight from our own experience. Even if one were to throw a very modest drinking party, perhaps even something quite small in scale, the presence of a celebrity, an influencer, a great scholar, or someone else of significant stature and renown could transform the gathering.

Perhaps we would not necessarily describe the drinking party itself as exceptionally "great," but it would certainly become memorable. In the minds of those attending, it could become a significant moment simply because such a person was present at this social gathering.

Moreover, there may be something particularly significant about encountering such people in the context of a drinking party. Drinking can relax certain social boundaries and make conversation easier. Rather than encountering a great person from afar or in a formal setting, participants might find themselves sitting alongside them, sharing a drink and engaging in conversation.

Perhaps that is what Rabbi Yudan bar Masparta and Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Simon were trying to point to with their midrashic positions. People had proximity and access to great individuals and could actually speak with them. Perhaps they could even gain knowledge or wisdom from them. This is certainly a fresh and fascinating way of understanding the story - and certainly not what most people would immediately identify as the thing that makes a drinking party "great".

Could Size Still Matter?

Of course, we might also wonder whether quantity played a role alongside quality. Perhaps this was a famous gathering throughout the region, with many, many people in attendance.

Indeed, quantity and quality might even have worked hand-in-hand. A huge turnout at Avraham's drinking party might have encouraged particularly prominent personalities to attend; their presence, in turn, would have contributed further to the significance of the event.

In that case, the party's greatness would not have come from a single factor. Its size, its guests, and the interactions among them could all have combined to make this an extraordinary occasion.

Textual Motivations for Midrashic Perspectives?

Ever since these midrashic perspectives were created, there have been multiple rabbinic attempts at explaining them. One of them that is fascinating is articulated by Rabbi David HaLevi Segal (1586-1667), who wrote (דברי דוד על רש"י, בראשית כ"א:ח; ד"ה משתה גדול שהיו שם גדולי הדור):

It appears that one can be precise here: in every other place where the making of a drinking party is mentioned, you find specified for whom he made the drinking party, such as with Pharaoh ("and he made a drinking party for all his servants" (Genesis 40:20)) and in the Book of

ונראה דיש לזקק
דבכ"מ מתמצא
עשיית משתה
תמצא אצלו למי
עשה המשתה כגון
בפרעה ויעש משתה
לכל עבדיו ובמגילת
אסתר ג' זכר לכל



New Episode

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* is about the inaugural Kosher Spirits Awards, the first kosher-certified spirits competition, which took place just this summer. The featured guest on the episode is head judge, Maggie Kimbel, who also came up with the idea for the competition.



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

JewishDrinking.com/KSA1episode



Esther, where it likewise mentions "for all his princes and his servants" (Esther 1:3). Here, however, it is not mentioned for whom he made it. Therefore, he explained "great" as meaning that "great people" were there, thus, it turns out that it is properly mentioned for whom he made the drinking party.

שריו ועבדיו וכן
לא נזכר למי
עשה, משתה
ע"כ פירש גדול
שהיו גדולים שם
נמצא שפיר
מוזכר למי עשה
המשתה

While Rabbi Segal's close textual reading is potentially compelling, yet we don't even have to look beyond the book of Genesis to see that a couple of instances of drinking parties are not specified for whom they were made (see Genesis 19:3 and 29:22), so it ultimately does not truly hold water, unless he would say that there were great people at those drinking parties, as well.

Another fascinating textual read is a grammatical one, provided by Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Ashkenazi (1630-1700), who wrote (די משה על בראשית רבה) (ניג"י, ד"ה רבי יודא):

And one should not raise a difficulty [by asking] that perhaps "a great drinking party" is meant literally - that he made a large meal. This is not so, because [if that were the case], it should have said *mishteh gedolah* in the feminine form [according to grammar rules]. For this reason, they disagree and state that "great" does not refer to the drinking party, but rather to the "great ones" of the generation. And this is simple to understand.

ואין להקשות
דלמא משתה
גדול כפשוטה
שעשה סעודה
גדולה זה אינו
דהל"ל משתה
גדולה לשון
נקבה [אינו]
ע"פ דקדוק]
לזה פליגי ואמר
שגדול לא קאי
על משתה אלא
גדולי הדור וק"ל

However, this grammatical approach was rejected by Rabbi David Pardo (1719-1792), who wrote (בראשית כ"א:ח; ד"ה משתה גדול שהיו שם) (משכיל לדוד, בראשית כ"א:ח):

He tried to prove that since the Biblical text wrote "*gadol*" (masculine "great"); for if it were otherwise, it should have said "*gedolah*" (feminine "great"), since *mishteh* (drinking party) is a feminine noun. However, this argument does not hold, as proven by the verse regarding Ahasuerus [where drinking party is also paired with the masculine adjective *gadol*].

שהכרוז
הוא מדכתיב
גדול דאליכ
הוליל גדולה
דמשתה ל'
נקבה וליתא
כאשר
הראיה
מקרא
דאחשוורוש

A different grammatical approach, which should certainly be of interest to readers of this publication, was articulated by Rabbi Yehudah Loew

{continued on the next page}



Aryeh Lebowitz
@bknwrabbi

Woman at the liquor store on Erev Rosh hashana: "Which holiday do you guys have today?"

Me: "The Jewish New Year"

Woman: "so you guys are gonna party tonight?!"

Me: "no, its actually more about introspection and repentance"

Woman (sees 2 cases of wine in my cart): "uh huh"

10:50 PM · Sep 27, 2022

{Avraham's Great Drinking Party continued from page 3}

ben Bezael (1512-1609) (popularly known as the Maharal), who wrote (נור אריה על בראשית כ"א; ח', ד"ה שהיו שם גדולי הדור):

For if this were not so, why did it write 'a great drinking party' here, whereas regarding Ahasuerus, even though he made a very great drinking party, 'great' is not written—because 'great' does not properly apply to a drinking party, for every drinking party is inherently great.	דאס לא כן למה כתב כאן "משתה גדול", ואילו גבי אשורוש אף על גב שנעשה גדול מאד לא כתיב 'גדול', דלא שייך 'גדול' במשתה, דכל משתה הוא גדול
--	--

I certainly enjoy Maharal's notion of every drinking party being great, but is that really so? In fact, when we consider the previous mention of a drinking party in the book of Genesis, it is Lot making a drinking party for the two angels who have showed up to his house (Genesis 19:3) - is that really a great drinking party? While he is trying to provide some textual backing for Rabbi Yudan bar Masparta's and Rabbi Yehudah ben Rabbi Simon's midrashic innovations in considering the attendees being great ones, I remain not particular convinced by such textual support. Nevertheless, the notion of "every drinking party is inherently great", then perhaps Maharal has supplied us not only with an explanation of the biblical text, but also with a wonderful consideration that no matter how small a drinking party is, it is always a great time

Celebrating a Remarkable Milestone

Or perhaps there is an even simpler possibility.

Maybe Avraham was simply extraordinarily excited about this moment. Isaac, the long-awaited son whose birth had seemed impossible, had survived infancy and reached an important new stage of life. Avraham's "great drinking party" could therefore reflect the sheer magnitude of his joy. The greatness of the mishteh would then correspond to the greatness of the occasion itself. Something remarkable had happened, and Avraham celebrated accordingly.



Rosh HaShanah Cocktail Ideas

In a deleted clip from the 114th episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, Dan Rabinowitz shared a few ideas for Rosh HaShanah cocktails (viewable at JewishDrinking.com/RHCocktailsDan):

Bourbon & Apple Brandy Old Fashioned

Ingredients:

- 1.5 oz Bourbon
- 0.75 oz Apple Brandy (such as Laird's Bottled in Bond or Calvados)
- 0.25 oz Simple Syrup (or maple syrup for a richer autumn profile)
- 2 dashes Angostura Bitters
- 1 dash Orange Bitters (optional)

Instructions:

1. Combine the bourbon, apple brandy, simple syrup, and bitters in a mixing glass.
2. Add ice and stir until well-chilled (about 20-30 seconds).
3. Strain into a rocks glass over one large ice cube.

Garnish with a thin apple slice or an orange peel.

The Bee's Knees

Ingredients:

- 2 oz London Dry Gin
- 0.75 oz Fresh Lemon Juice
- 0.5 oz Honey Syrup (see below)

Instructions:

1. Make the Honey Syrup: Combine equal parts (1:1) hot water and your chosen single-origin honey. Stir until completely dissolved and let it cool.
2. Add the gin, fresh lemon juice, and honey syrup to a cocktail shaker.
3. Fill with ice and shake vigorously for 10-15 seconds.
4. Double strain into a chilled coupe or martini glass.

Garnish with a lemon twist.

Apple Peel & Core Sour

The Apple Peel Syrup:

- 1 cup Water
- 1 cup Granulated Sugar
- Peels and cores from 2 to 3 apples (tart varieties like Granny Smith or Honeycrisp work best)
- Process: Combine all ingredients in a small saucepan over medium heat. Stir until the sugar dissolves, then lower the heat and simmer for 10 minutes. Remove from heat, cover, and let steep for 30 minutes. Strain out the solids and keep the syrup refrigerated.

The Cocktail Ingredients:

- 2 oz Apple Brandy (or Bourbon, if preferred)
- 0.75 oz Fresh Lemon Juice
- 0.75 oz Apple Peel Syrup

Instructions:

1. Combine the apple brandy, lemon juice, and apple peel syrup in a cocktail shaker.
2. Add ice and shake vigorously to chill and aerate.
3. Strain into a rocks glass over fresh ice.

Garnish with a dehydrated apple chip or a cinnamon stick.

Conclusion: What Makes a Drinking Party Great?

Genesis does not tell us precisely what made Avraham's drinking party so great, leaving us with several intriguing possibilities. Was it the number of people? The stature of those who attended? The unusual opportunity for conversation and connection? The magnitude of the milestone being celebrated? Or perhaps some combination of all of these?

Whatever the answer, the Torah's description invites us to consider that the greatness of a drinking party need not be measured simply by how much is poured. A gathering can become great because of the people around the table, the conversations that take place, the relationships that are strengthened, and the significance of the moment being celebrated.

As we encounter Avraham's mishteh gadol at the beginning of a new Jewish year, perhaps that is an especially fitting aspiration: may the coming year provide us with occasions worth celebrating, wonderful people with whom to celebrate them, meaningful conversations over our drinks—and, indeed, some truly great drinking parties.

L'chaim 🍷

