

Michayev Inish Livsumei Befuraiya Ad Delo Yada ...

A Closer Look at Drinking on Purim

Megillah 7b

Teacher's Guide

Drunkenness is condemned, forbidden, and admonished against – to varying degrees – in the Torah, Prophets, Writings, Talmud, and Jewish ethical literature. Intoxication can lead to loss of self-control, alcohol addiction, transgression, weakened morality, and crime.

With this in mind we are surprised to read an offbeat line in the Talmud (Megillah 7b), where **Rava tells us: “A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai.’”** This cryptic line is followed by an even more eyebrow-raising anecdote about Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira, two sages who had experienced an unusual, and controversial, Purim feast.

In this *Thinking Gemara* shiur we will attempt – through the eyes of generations of Jewish thinkers and halachic authorities – to figure out what the Talmud is trying to teach us in this puzzling passage. Our quest will demand a thorough examination of the halachic sources that deal with drinking on Purim.

This class will address the following questions:

KEY QUESTIONS

- How does the function of drinking on Purim contrast with its function on other Jewish holidays?
- What does Rava mean by “until he cannot distinguish between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’”?
- What are the halachic guidelines for drinking on Purim?
- What is the underlying meaning behind drinking on Purim?

**CLASS
OUTLINE****Introduction: Drink Until You Drop?****Section I. The Problem with Rava's Statement - The Duality of Wine****Section II. How Much Should You Drink on Purim?**

Part A. It is *Prohibited* to Get Drunk

Part B. It is *Permitted* (and on Purim Obligatory) to Get Drunk

Part C. How Much Should One Drink?

Part D. What Is the Halachah?

Section III. When and What Should You Drink on Purim?

Part A. When Should You Drink on Purim?

Part B. What Should You Drink on Purim?

Section IV. Insights into Why We Drink on Purim

Part A. Why is Drinking on Purim Different from Other Festivals?

Part B. Demonstrating our Dependence on God

Part C. Creating Jewish Unity

Part D. Revealing Inner Secrets

Part E. Getting High from the Day of Purim Itself!

Note: This shiur is not intended as a source of practical *halachic* (legal) rulings. For matters of halachah, please consult a qualified *posek* (rabbi).

INTRODUCTION Drink Until You Drop?

When Rabbi Simcha Finebloom opened the door to welcome the beaming group of students from his weekly campus Talmud class to join his family for the Purim seuda (dinner), he was stunned. Not because they actually showed up, but by the massive quantity of wines, whiskey, and beer that lined his sidewalk, followed by a stack of sleeping bags. "We took you seriously Rabbi," called out Michael holding up two bottles of wine, "when you said we should drink until we fall asleep. We understood that means drinking until we pass out!" Rabbi Finebloom sprung into action. "Hey guys, perfect timing, let me give you a hand - I mean a hand truck - let's move the bottles into the living room and have that Talmud class I promised on drinking on Purim, while my wife finishes cooking the Purim banquet!"

There is certainly much hype and excitement about drinking on Purim. It is important to temper the exuberance by gaining clarity into how much, what and why we drink on Purim. Let's join Rabbi Finebloom's shiur...

SECTION I The Problem with Rava's Statement - The Duality of Wine

Judaism views wine as a sublime and powerful drink, and therefore many mitzvot actually involve wine consumption. On festivals we are charged with being joyous, which we are instructed to achieve by drinking wine. Moreover, many mitzvot involve a *kos shel berachah* (cup of blessing), including Kiddush on Shabbat and holidays, at wedding ceremonies, circumcisions, *birkat hamazon* (grace after meals), the four cups on Seder Night - all these are ideally accompanied by a cup of wine. In contrast to the blessing said on most beverages (*shehakol nihiyeh bed'varo*), the importance of wine earned it its own blessing - *borei p'ri hagefen*.

[Note - For those who dislike wine, it can be substituted by other beverages (with the possible exception of the four cups on Pesach night), and **must** be substituted if wine or alcohol presents a health hazard or a threat of addiction.]

Furthermore, wine can be mind-expanding ("Wine and fragrances made me wise," said our Sage Rava on Yoma 76b) and brings happiness ("Wine brings happiness to a person's heart," says Tehillim/Psalms 104:15).

On the other hand, wine's intoxicative potential can wreak destruction, leading a person out of control and causing physical and emotional harm to himself and others. In recognition of wine's dual nature and power, the Maharal writes:

1. Maharal, Chiddushei Aggadot Vol. III, Sanhedrin 70a, pp. 168-169 - Wine's dual potential.

Wine is not part of this world, for wine has a Divine aspect to it, in that it "gladdens God and man" (Shoftim/Judges 9:13). This can be understood by noting that wine comes from

פִּירוּשׁ הַיַּיִן אֵינוֹ רְאוּי לְעוֹלָם הַזֶּה,
כִּי הַיַּיִן יֵשׁ בּוֹ עֲנֵן אֱלֹקֵי שָׁהֲרַי
הוּא מְשַׂמֵּחַ אֱלֹקִים וְאֲנָשִׁים.
וְדָבָר זֶה יְכוּל הָאָדָם לְדַעַת וּלְהִבִּין

the inner part of a grape, which is hidden. This indicates that wine comes from a hidden place [and has a spiritual aspect] that is not part of the visible world...

All things that are powerful and possess a Divine aspect can be used correctly to acquire a spiritual ascent; however, one who uses them incorrectly acquires a form of death...When one drinks wine correctly, he is made sharp and given Divine wisdom. But if one drinks to fulfill his base desires, and becomes drunk, he brings upon himself death and mourning.

שֶׁהוּא יוֹצֵא מִן פְּנִימֵי הָעֵנָב
שֶׁהוּא נִסְתָּר, מוֹרָה עַל שְׁהִיּוֹן יֵשׁ
לֹא מְקוֹם נִסְתָּר אֵינּוּ מִן הָעוֹלָם
בְּנִגְלָה....

... וְכָל דְּבַר שֶׁהוּא חָשׁוּב וְיֵשׁ בּוֹ
עֲנִין אֱלֹקֵי אִם יִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בּוֹ כְּרְאוּי
קוֹנֵה ע"י זֶה מַעֲלָה, וְאִם אֵינּוּ
מִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בּוֹ כְּרְאוּי קוֹנֵה ע"י זֶה
מִיתָה... וְכֵן כְּאֲשֶׁר יִשְׁתֶּה הֵיּוֹן
כְּרְאוּי מְפַקֵּחַ אוֹתוֹ וְנוֹתֵן לּוֹ
הַשְׂכָּל הָעֲלִיּוֹן, וְאִם אֵינּוּ כֵּן רַק
שׁוֹתֶה אוֹתוֹ לְתַאֲוָתוֹ וְיִשְׁתַּכַּר
מִבֵּיא לּוֹ יְלָלָה וּמִיתָה.

The Torah itself testifies to the destructive influence of wine. The first recorded instance of drunkenness in the Torah is the story of Noach (Noah) after the flood. Even though Noach's righteousness enabled him to save his family from the flood, he later planted a vineyard, became drunk, and was sodomized (or, possibly, castrated) by his son, Cham (Bereishit/Genesis 9:20-24).

2. Ramban (Nachmanides), Commentary on Bereishit 9:26 – Why does the Torah tell us about Noach's drunkenness?

The Noach wine episode was written in the Torah because it contains a warning more powerful than the passage of the Nazirite (Bamidbar/Numbers 6:1-21). Even Noach, the pure tzaddik (righteous man) who saved the whole world through his righteousness, was led astray through wine. It brought disgrace upon him and a curse to his offspring.

וְנִכְתָּב עֲנִין הֵיּוֹן בְּנִחַ כִּי יֵשׁ בּוֹ
אֲזָהָרָה מְמֻנּוֹ יוֹתֵר מִפְּרִשְׁת
נְזִירוֹת, כִּי הִצְדִּיק תָּמִים אֲשֶׁר
צִדְקוֹ הִצִּיל כָּל הָעוֹלָם, גַּם אוֹתוֹ
הִחֲטִיא הֵיּוֹן וְהֵבִיא אוֹתוֹ לְיָדֵי
בְּזִיוֹן וּמְלִלַת זִרְעוֹ:

To get a picture of wine's duality, compare Chapters Five and Six of the Book of Bamidbar. In Chapter Five, the Torah relates to the infamous Sotah woman, suspected by her husband of infidelity. Chapter Six immediately follows with the laws of the *Nazir* (Nazirite), who vows not to drink wine, come in contact with the dead, or cut his hair for thirty days.

The contrast between the following two comments by Rashi is remarkable.

3. Rashi's Commentary on Bamidbar 6:2 – Why does the Nazir immediately follow the Sotah?

Why is the section dealing with the Nazirite juxtaposed to the section of the adulterous

לָמָּה נִסְמְכָה פְּרִשְׁת נְזִיר
לְפָרִשְׁת סוֹטָה? לֹא מֵר לָּהּ שֶׁכָּפַל

woman? To tell us that whoever sees an adulteress in her disgrace should vow to abstain from wine, for it leads to adultery (Sotah 2a).

הַרוֹאֶה סוֹטָה בְּקִלְקוּלָהּ יִזְרֵי
עֲצָמוֹ מִן הַיַּיִן שֶׁהוּא מְבִיא לְיָדֵי
נִיאוּף (סוֹטָה ב.):

4. Rashi's Commentary on Bamidbar 6:11 – Why does the Nazir bring a sin offering [after coming into contact with the dead]?

For he did not take precautions against becoming defiled by the dead. Rabbi Elazar Hakappar says: **He afflicted himself by abstaining from wine** [thereby sinning against his own body, which is the literal translation of the words *asher chata al nefesh*] (based on Nazir 19a and other sources).

מֵאַשֶׁר חָטָא עַל הַנֶּפֶשׁ - שֶׁלֹּא
נִזְהַר מִטְּמֵאֵת הַמֵּת. רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר
הַקַּפָּר אָמַר שֶׁצָּעַר עֲצָמוֹ מִן
הַיַּיִן:

The Nazirite is both lauded for refraining from wine – as a safeguard against promiscuity – and chided for abstaining from it! The Torah, in the same breath, both warns us of wine's dangers and reminds us that this is not a legitimate reason for entire abstinence from alcohol.

After seeing all of the above – clear denouncements of drunkenness, along with the requirement to drink found in many mitzvot – we are amazed to read Rava's striking statement about drinking on Purim:

5. Megillah 7b – Rava describes the obligation to drink on Purim.

Rava said: A person is obligated to get drunk (Rashi – the Aramaic word *livsumei* means to get drunk on wine) on Purim until he cannot distinguish between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordechai.”

אָמַר רַבָּא: מִיִּחְיִיב אִינִישׁ
לְבִסּוּמֵי (רש"י - לְהַשְׁתַּכֵּר
בַּיַּיִן) בְּפִרְיָא עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין
אָרוּר הָמָן לְבְרוּךְ מֹרְדֵכַי.

This statement is difficult to understand. How much drinking does it take to not know the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’? Certainly, the apparent meaning is that Rava advocates drunkenness on Purim. In light of the negative Torah view of intoxication, how is this possible?

Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira's Purim Feast

The Gemara presents a follow-up story that seems even more problematic.

6. Megillah 7b – Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira share a Purim feast.

Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira made a Purim feast together. They drank, whereupon Rabbah arose and killed [lit. slaughtered] Rabbi Zeira. The next day, Rabbah pleaded for Divine mercy, and thereby brought Rabbi Zeira back to life. The next year,

רַבָּה וְרַבִּי זֵירָא עָבְדוּ סְעוּדַת
פּוּרִים בְּהַדֵּי הַדֵּדִי, אִיבְסוּם,
קָם רַבָּה שֶׁחֲטִייה לְרַבִּי זֵירָא.
לְמַחֵר בְּעֵי רַחֲמֵי וְאַחֲיִיה. לְשָׁנָה
אָמַר לִיָּהּ: נִיתִי מֵר וְנִנְעָבִיד

Rabbah said to Rabbi Zeira, “Come, let’s make a Purim feast together.” Rabbi Zeira said, “Miracles do not happen all the time.”

סְעוּדַת פּוּרִים בְּהֵדֵי הֶדְדִי!
- אָמַר לֵיהּ: לֹא בְּכָל שְׁעָתָא
וְשְׁעָתָא מִתְרַחֵשׁ נִיסָא.

Taken at face value, this story is both shocking and miraculous. How did Rabbah allow himself to get so drunk that he slaughtered his friend?! Some commentators, such as the Maharsha, do not take this story literally. If so, what does it actually mean?

7. Maharsha, Megillah 7b – What really happened at the Rabbah-Rabbi Zeira Purim feast?

“Rabbah arose and killed [lit. slaughtered] Rabbi Zeira” – it is unthinkable to explain this passage literally. Rather, the meaning is it was “as if he killed him,” i.e. Rabbah gave him wine and forced him [perhaps this means that he convinced him of the obligation] to drink too much until Rabbi Zeira fell ill and was in danger of dying. Thus, the Talmud employs the term “slaughtering,” for drinking wine is done via the throat, which is the place of slaughtering ... and Rabbah prayed that Rabbi Zeira would not die from this illness. And we find that the term “bring back to life” is a substitute for “heal.”

קָם רַבָּה שְׁחִטָּיה לְרַבִּי זֵירָא
וְכוּ. דְּבַר תְּמוּנָה הוּא לְפָרְשׁוֹ
כְּפִשְׁטֵינָה, וְנִרְאָה דְרַצוֹנָו לֹאמַר
כְּעֵין שְׁחִטָּיה, דְּאִגְבְּרִיהַ חֲמָרָא
וְכַפִּיָּיה לְשִׁתּוֹת יוֹתֵר מִדְּאֵי עַד
שְׁחָלָה וְנִטָּה לְמוֹת, וְלִכְדָּ נִקְטִיָּה
בְּלִשׁוֹן שְׁחִיטָה דְשִׁתִּיתַי תַּיִן
נִקְרָא עַל שֵׁם הַגְּרוֹן מְקוֹם
שְׁחִיטָה ... וְקָאמְרִי דְהִתְפַּלֵּל
עָלָיו שְׁלֹא יָמוּת מִחוּלֵי זָה עַד
שְׁנִיתְרַפָּא, וְחָי, וּמְצִינּוּ בְּמִקְרָא
וּבִתְלִמוּד לְשׁוֹן חַי מְלִשׁוֹן
רְפוּאָה:

Other commentaries, both early and late, do not seem to agree with this innovative interpretation. Even according to the Maharsha, the story does not bode well for the potential consequences of drinking on Purim. What does the Gemara wish to teach us in citing this story, and what are the implications concerning the obligation to drink on Purim?

KEY THEMES OF SECTION I

- The Torah seems to take a clear anti-drunkenness stance:
- The stories of Noach and Lot illustrate the harsh consequences of excessive drinking, as do the passages about the Sotah woman and the Nazirite.
- It is true, as the Maharal points out, that wine also has great potential for good, and is therefore a key part of a number of mitzvot like Kiddush – but **too much** wine is problematic.
- Two things about Purim are therefore very surprising: Rava tells us that one is obligated to drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordechai”; then the Gemara tells us a story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira’s Purim feast where they drank to the point that Rabbah slaughtered Rabbi Zeira!

- Even though the Maharsha gives a non-literal interpretation of the story, which somewhat tones down its complexity, we are still left wishing for a deeper understanding of this cryptic anecdote.

Our investigation into drinking on Purim will now be divided into the following three components: Section II examines how halachic authorities view Rava's statement and the incident of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira; Section III discusses when and what one should drink on Purim; and Section IV explores the philosophical ideas behind drinking on Purim.

SECTION II How Much Should You Drink on Purim?

Rava seems to state (Source 5 above) that one is **required** to get inebriated on Purim. Yet, we will see a range of positions on the extent to which one is obligated or prohibited to drink on Purim. To begin, there are authorities who posit outright that it is forbidden to get inebriated, even on Purim.

Part A. It Is *Forbidden* to Get Drunk

One group of authorities, based on their understanding of the incident of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira, rule that it is forbidden to get drunk on Purim. Halachah, according to them, does not follow Rava's teaching.

8. Baal Hamaor on the Rif, Megillah 3b (pages of the Rif) – What did Rabbeinu Ephraim hold about drinking on Purim?

Rabbah [Rabbah, not Rava, in the version of the Baal Hamaor] said: A person is obligated to get drunk on Purim...Rav Ephraim, of blessed memory, wrote that based on the episode that follows, where Rabbah got up and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira, and the following year Rabbah suggested that they make another Purim feast together (whose offer was then declined by Rabbi Zeira)...Rabbah's statement was rejected from the halachah. It is therefore improper to get drunk on Purim.

אמר רבא תיב איניש
לבסומי בפורי'א כו' כתב
הרב אפרים ז"ל למה הוא
עובדא דקם רבא שחטיה
לרבי זירא לשנה אמר ליה
תא נעביד כו' אידחי ליה
מימרא דרבא ולית הלכתא
פוותיה ולא שפיר דמי
למעבד הכי.

According to Rabbeinu Ephraim, the story of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira is cited by the Gemara to teach us that "it is improper" to get drunk on Purim.

Other authorities go even further, explaining that the Talmudic citation of the anecdote where Rabbah "slaughtered" Rabbi Zeira means to categorically prohibit drunkenness on Purim (because it can lead to transgressions such as murder!). These authorities offer different interpretations of Rava's statement.

9. Beit Yosef Orach Chaim 695 “Katuv Be’Orchot Chaim” – The mitzvah to drink on Purim is not, according to the Orchot Chaim, to get inebriated.

The Orchot Chaim (Laws of Purim 38) writes that when [Rava] said, “One is obligated to ‘get drunk’ on Purim,” he did not mean that one should drink to the point of inebriation, for getting drunk is absolutely forbidden! In fact, there is no greater transgression than getting drunk, for it leads to forbidden sexual relationships, bloodshed and other transgressions.

כתוב באֲרְחוֹת חַיִּים (הַלְכוֹת פורים אות לח) חַיִּיב אֵינֶשׁ לְבִסּוּמֵי בְּפִרְיָא לֹא שְׂיִשְׁתַּכַּר שֶׁהַשִּׁכְרוּת אִיסוּר גָּמוּר וְאֵין לָהּ עֲבִירָה גְדוּלָה מִזֶּה שֶׁהוּא גוֹרֵם לְגִלוּי עֲרִוּוֹת וְשִׁפְכוּת דַּמִּים וְכַמָּה עֲבִירוֹת זֹלָתָן.

The Meiri points out an additional concern about getting inebriated on Purim: it is demeaning and prevents a person from making the most of the great day.

10. Meiri, Beit Ha-bechirah, Megillah 7b – Getting drunk is demeaning and prohibited.

One is obligated to be extremely joyous on this day (Purim), and enjoy feasting and drinking, to the point where he lacks nothing. However, we are not commanded to get drunk and demean ourselves during the festivities. We are not instructed to experience a hollow, frivolous joy, but rather to enjoy a meaningful happiness that leads to love of God and appreciation for the Purim miracles that God orchestrated for us. As for the Talmud’s instruction to drink “until he cannot distinguish between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’” – some of the great scholars have already pointed out that the incident [of Rabbah and Rabbi Zeira] cited in proximity, where “Rabbah got up and slaughtered Rabbi Zeira” indicates the Talmud’s rejection of Rava’s law.

חַיִּיב אָדָם לְהִרְבוֹת בְּשִׂמְחָה בְּיוֹם זֶה וּבְאֲכִילָה וּבְשִׁתְּיָה עַד שֶׁלֹּא יַחְסֹר שׂוּם דְּבָר. וּמְכַל מְקוּם אֵין אָנוּ מְצִוִּין לְהִשְׁתַּכַּר וְלְהִפְחִית עַצְמֵנוּ מִתּוֹךְ הַשִּׂמְחָה. שֶׁלֹּא נִצְטוּיְנוּ עַל שִׂמְחָה שֶׁל הוֹלָלוּת וְשֶׁל שְׂטוּת, אֲלֵא בְּשִׂמְחָה שֶׁל תַּעֲנוּג שְׂנִינִיעַ מִתּוֹכָהּ לְאַהֲבַת הַשֵּׁם וְהוֹדָאָה עַל הַנִּסִּים שֶׁעָשָׂה לָנוּ. וּמָה שֶׁאָמַר בָּאן “עַד דְּלֹא יֵדַע בֵּין אַרוּר הַמֶּן לְבוֹרֵךְ מְרַדְּכִי,” כְּבַר פְּרָשׁוֹ קֶצֶת גְּאוּנִים שֶׁמִּמָּה שֶׁהוֹפִיר אַחֲרָיו “קָם רַבָּא שֶׁחֲטִיָּה לְרַבֵּי זֵירָא,” נִדְּחוּ כָּל אוֹתָם הַדְּבָרִים.

According to the above authorities, it emerges that one is not permitted to get drunk – even on Purim. It is moreover possible (as we will see further below) that even Rava did not mean that one should actually get drunk.

Part B. It is *Permitted* (and on Purim Obligatory) to Get Drunk

As opposed to Rabbeinu Ephraim’s approach, Rava’s statement is quoted without qualification by many halachic authorities, including the Rif (Megillah 3b), the Rosh (Megillah 1:8), the Tur (Orach Chaim 695), and the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 695).

According to these authorities, it seems that the passage should be understood literally, and that this is the normative halachah – a person should actually get drunk on Purim. Having seen a generally negative view on drunkenness, which some authorities understand as a full prohibition, how can this instruction be understood?

Firstly, it is important to note that a number of sources indicate that becoming drunk is not a full prohibition. Take, for instance, the drinking of the sons of our Patriarch Jacob:

11. Bereishit 43:33-34 – The Tribes got drunk together in Egypt.

They sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, and Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank, and became intoxicated with him.

וַיֵּשְׁבוּ לְפָנָיו הַבְּכֹר בְּכֹרֶתוֹ וְהַצְעִיר
כְּצַעֲרָתוֹ וַיִּתְמְהוּ הָאֲנָשִׁים אִישׁ אֶל
רֵעֵהוּ:
וַיֵּשָׂא מִשָּׂאת מֵאֵת פָּנָיו אֲלֵהֶם וַיִּתְּרַב
מִשָּׂאת בְּנִימֹן מִמִּשָּׂאת כָּלֶם חֲמִשׁ
יְדוֹת וַיִּשְׁתּוּ וַיִּשְׁכְּרוּ עִמּוֹ:

If the great sons of Jacob, who established the nation of Israel, could become intoxicated in their family feast, then surely doing so doesn't imply so heinous a sin!

Indeed, in the Talmud we also find an instance of great rabbis and their disciples getting drunk. The passage relates to the laws of medicinal healing on Shabbat; although it is generally forbidden to take medicines on Shabbat (depending on circumstances), it is permitted to use a potion that "cures" a person of intoxication.

12. Shabbat 66b – Alleviating intoxication on Shabbat.

Rav Hama b. Guria said: One may rub in oil and salt on the Sabbath. Like Rav Huna at Rav's academy, and Rav at R. Hiyya's, and R. Hiyya at Rabbi's – when they felt the effect of the wine they would bring oil and salt and rub into the palms of their hands and the instep of their feet and say: "Just as this oil is becoming clear, so let so-and-so's wine become clear."

אמר רב חמא בר גוריא מותר לסוך
שמן ומלח בשבת. כי הא דרב הונא
מבי רב ורב מבי רבי חייא ורבי
חייא מבי רבי כי הוו מיבסמי מייתי
משחא ומילחא ושייפי להו לגוייתא
דידיהו וגוייתא דכרעייהו ואמרי כי
היכי דציל הא מישחא ליציל חמריה
דפלניא בר פלניא:

Rashi explains that rabbinic mentors would customarily give their disciples to drink. These particular disciples were of special eminence, and it was undignified for them to remain intoxicated – which is why they used the prescribed treatment. This remedy is mentioned by the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 328:41). Clearly, then, becoming intoxicated, on a certain level, is not prohibited.

The question now falls back onto those authorities who appear to prohibit getting drunk. How can the Orchot Chaim, as noted above, declare that this involves a heinous crime, if great sages and Torah figures did it?

The answer to this lies, it seems, in a distinction between getting “drunk” and getting “stoned.” In this sense, halachah differentiates between a regular level of drunkenness, and “the drunkenness of Lot.”

The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 99:1) writes that a person can recite blessings even while drunk. The Mishnah Berurah comments:

13. Mishnah Berurah 99:11 – The level of “the drunkenness of Lot.”

This halachah applies until a person has reached the level of “the drunkenness of Lot.” At this level, he is considered as though he has entirely lost his mind, and is exempt from all mitzvot. Therefore, if he recited [the Shema] or blessings in such a state of mind, he does not fulfill his obligation, because under such circumstances he is exempt. He must therefore recite [Shema] and the blessings again, later on.

וכ"ז כשלא הגיע לשכרותו של לוט דאל"ה כשוטה יחשב לגמרי לכו"ע ופטור אז מכל המצוות ע"כ אפילו בדיעבד אם קרא אז ובירך לא מיפטר בכך שהרי פטור היה באותה שעה וחייב אח"כ לחזור ולקרות ולברך.

Based on this distinction, it can be suggested that there is no contradiction between the prohibition noted by the Orchot Chaim, and the anecdotes recording distinguished people who got drunk (mentioning no criticism of the practice).

14. Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer – To Drink or Not to Drink? dinonline.org/2010/10/07/to-drink-or-not-to-drink.

It appears that the Orchot Chaim made his comment specifically with regard to this level of getting drunk, whereby a person denies his own consciousness and mind. Concerning the “drunkenness of Lot” (which refers at the very least to a level of “very drunk”) the Orchot Chaim rules that willfully entering the condition is a heinous crime.

In this light, there is no longer any question on the Orchot Chaim from instances recorded in Scripture and in the writings of Chazal in which great and righteous leaders became drunk. The drunkenness mentioned by the Gemara (Shabbat 66b) does not refer to the “drunkenness of Lot” – had the disciples become drunk to such a degree, it would have been difficult for them to take the prescribed antidote. The same is surely true of the *shevatim* [tribes], and of other instances where drunkenness is mentioned with regard to distinguished individuals. The contradiction with the ruling of Orchot Chaim is thus resolved.

Indeed, Rav Leib Mintzberg (Torati Bekirbam, Vol. 1, p. 242) has written that it is certainly forbidden to willfully enter a level of “the drunkenness of Lot,” whereby he entirely loses the Divine Image in which man was created.

Although the Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chaim 695:2) does not mention this prohibition (though he cites it in Beit Yosef), and quotes the obligation of becoming drunk on Purim without qualification, the intention is certainly not to reach the “drunkenness of Lot,” but only to reach the level of *shikor*.

Certainly, it is forbidden to get “smashed” to the point where a person loses his very consciousness. On the other hand, it is certainly permitted to get drunk to a certain degree. The question between different authorities is where to place, on the spectrum between drinking more than usual and actually getting drunk, the concept of drinking on Purim.

Part C. How Much Should One Drink?

Certainly, one should drink *something* on Purim. The days of Purim are “days of feasting and rejoicing” (Esther 9:22), which implies a degree of drinking (see Shibbolei HaLeket 201).

According to the above authorities (see Part A) who write that one should not get drunk at all, it will be proper to drink the regular amount for a banquet at which wine is served.

On the other hand, according to the authorities (mentioned at the beginning of Part B) who cite Rava's instruction without qualification, it seems that one should simply drink to the point of intoxication. As noted, one must be wary of excess, and never get “stone drunk.” By becoming intoxicated, one fulfills the idea of “not knowing the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’” on a literal level.

The Rambam who harshly criticizes drunkenness (see De'ot 5:3, where he writes that one who becomes drunk is a “sinner and a disgrace”), offers a creative and more moderate interpretation of the obligation.

15. Rambam (Maimonides), Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Megillah ve'Chanukah 2:15 – Drink until you sleep.

What is the obligation of this [Purim] feast? It is that a person should eat meat and prepare as nice a meal as he is able to. He should also **drink wine until he becomes drunk and falls asleep** out of drunkenness.

כִּיצַד חֻבַּת סְעוּדָה זוֹ שְׂיֵאכַל
בְּשֵׁר וְיִתְקַן סְעוּדָה נְאֻחַ כְּפִי
אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא יָדוֹ וְשׁוֹתָהּ יַיִן עַד
שְׂיִשְׁתַּכֵּר וְיִרְדָּם בְּשִׁכְרוּת.

By drinking oneself to sleep, one fulfills the instruction of not knowing the difference between Haman and Mordechai!

16. Mahari Brin (quoted in the Darche Moshe Orach Chaim 695) – How do you fulfill “not knowing the difference between Haman and Mordechai”?

The Mahari Brin wrote that this (drink until you do not know) means that you get drunk and fall asleep and thereby do not know the difference between cursed is Haman [and blessed is Mordechai]. This also seems to be what the Rambam holds.

ומהר"י ברין כתב דְרוּצָה
לוֹמַר שְׂיִשְׁתַּכֵּר וְיִישָׁן וְלֹא
יָדַע בֵּין אֲרוּר הָמָן וְכוּ
מִשְׁמַע בְּמִימוֹנֵי.

If the Rambam lessens the degree of required drunkenness, other authorities substitute “tipsy” for “drunk.” The Orach Chaim, as we saw, comes out against

drunkenness, and maintains that the obligation of drinking on Purim goes no further than drinking “a little more than usual” (not like Rashi; see Source 5 above). Thus, one should become tipsy – not drunk!

Reaching a similar conclusion, other authorities understand that a person should drink until he loses his clarity of thought. This is a creative interpretation of Rava's instruction whereby one must drink until he no longer discerns between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordechai.”

17. Darche Moshe Orach Chaim 695 – Different interpretations of “not knowing the difference between Haman and Mordechai.”

<p>But in the Chidushei Agudah (Megillah 6) and the Toldot Adam Vachava 10:1 (page 62c of Rabbeinu Yerucham) it is written that the numerical equivalent of [the Hebrew letters of] <i>arur Haman</i> (cursed be Haman) and <i>baruch Mordechai</i> (blessed be Mordechai) are identical (see chart below); one must drink enough to render himself unable to figure out the calculation ... The Minhagim wrote that there was a liturgical poem where the refrain would alternate between <i>arur Haman</i> and <i>baruch Mordechai</i>; one needs clarity to not occasionally make a mistake...</p>	<p>אָבֵל בְּחִידוּשֵׁי אֲגוּדָה (מְגִלָּה ס' ו) וּבְתוֹלְדוֹת אָדָם וְחוּה נְתִיב י' חֶלֶק א' (סב ע"ג) כְּתַב דְּחֻשְׁבוֹן אָרוּר הָמָן וּבְרוּךְ מְרַדְכֵי שׁוּה וְצָרִיף לְהַשְׁתַּכַּר עַד שְׁלֵא יֵדַע הַחֻשְׁבוֹן ... הַמְנַהֲגִים כְּתַבוּ דְפִיּוּט אֶחָד הָיָה שֶׁהָיוּ עוֹנִין עַל בֵּית אֶחָד אָרוּר הָמָן וְעַל בֵּית אֶחָד בְּרוּךְ מְרַדְכֵי וְצָרִיף צִילוּתָא שְׁלֵא יִשְׁעָה לְפַעֲמִים...</p>
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total		ן	מ	ה	ר	ו	ר	א
502		50	40	5	200	6	200	1

total		י	כ	ד	ר	מ	ך	ו	ר	ב
502		10	20	4	200	40	20	6	200	2

Thus, we can point out three basic approaches to the question of how much to drink:

1. The literal approach: Drink until you're drunk (but not too drunk).
2. The non-literal approach: Drink until you fall asleep.
3. Creative interpretation: Drink until you can't make mathematical calculations, or until you get confused in your singing.

Finally, one source suggests that the word “**until**” of “until he cannot tell between” should be understood to mean “**up to and not including**.”

18. Yad Ephraim (Rabbi Ephraim Zalman Margaliot, 1762-1828), Orach Chaim 695 – Stop drinking when you cannot thank God properly for the Purim miracles.

<p>Many want to resolve and explain the intention of this passage (Rava's cryptic statement about</p>	<p>רַבִּים רוֹצִים לְתַרְץ וּלְפָרֵשׂ מֵהַ הַפְּנוּה בְּזוּה וְלִי הַצְעִיר מִתְפָּרֵשׂ</p>
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drinking on Purim)...It was explained to me in a dream that the main obligation of drinking is to be immersed in joy as it is written (Tehillim 104:15), "Wine gladdens a person's heart." From this joy...a person will wholeheartedly thank and praise God for the Purim miracles. Therefore, a person should not become so inebriated that he loses his reasoning ability and thus does not recognize the impact of the Purim miracles.

Rava's words, "A person must drink on Purim until he does not know..." means that a person drinks only up until the point where he still maintains the ability to fulfill the obligation to give thanks and praise [to God], but not beyond that point, since he would become confused. Going too far would render him unable to distinguish between "cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai," and therefore not have sufficient comprehension to praise God for the Purim miracles.

בְּחִזְיוֹן לִילָה שֶׁהִפְנִינָה הִיא שְׁעִיקָר
הַחַיִּיב שֶׁל הַמְּשִׁתָּה הוּא שְׂיֵהִיָּה
שְׂרוּי בְּשִׂמְחָה בְּדַכְתִּיב (תְּהִלִּים
קד:טו) וַיֵּין וְשִׂמַח לִבֵּב אֲנוּשׁ,
וּמְחַמֵּת שְׂיֵהִיָּה שְׂרוּי בְּשִׂמְחָה יֵהִיָּה
חֲדוֹת ד' מְעוּזוֹ וַיִּתֵּן תּוֹדוֹת וְהִלֵּל
לְד' עַל הַנֶּס מִתּוֹךְ הַרְחַבַת הַלֵּב,
וְלָכֵן אֵין לוֹ לְהִשְׁתַּכֵּר יוֹתֵר מִדְּאֵי
שְׂיִתְבַּלְבֵּל דַּעְתּוֹ וְלֹא יִפִּיר בְּתוֹקֶף
הַנֶּס כָּלֵל.

וְזֹאת אוֹמְרַת חַיִּיב אָדָם לְבִסּוּמֵי
בְּפוּרֵיָא עַד שְׁלֹא יָדַע, הֵךְ עַד הוּא
וְלֹא עַד בְּכָלֵל, וְרַצוֹנוֹ לומר שֶׁגָּדוֹל
חַיִּיב הַשְׂתִּיָּה בְּזֶה לְבִסּוּמֵי עַד
גָּבוּל דְּלֹא יָדַע, שֶׁמֶן הַגָּבוּל הַזֶּה
וְהַלָּא הוּא בְּטוֹל כּוֹנֵן חַיִּיב שְׂחִיבוֹ
חֲכָמִים לְבִסּוּמֵי כְּדֵי שְׂיִתֵּן הַלֵּל
וְהוֹדָאָה, שְׂכִינּוֹן שְׂיִתְבַּלְבֵּל דַּעְתּוֹ
כָּל כֹּף דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אָרוּר הָמָן ...
פְּשִׁיטָא שְׂאֵין בּוֹ דַּעַת וְתַבּוּנָה
לְשַׁבַּח וּלְפָאֵר עַל תּוֹקֶף הַנֶּס...

Based on his suggestion, the Yad Ephraim explains that the incident of Rabbah slaughtering Rabbi Zeira means to support the warning against drinking too much, which can compromise the entire purpose of drinking.

Part D. What Is the Halachah?

All major halachic authorities follow the ruling of Rava: It is obligatory to drink on Purim to a greater extent than regular days and regular festivals. They do not support the view (cited in Part A) that the Gemara cites the disastrous anecdote of Rabbah and Rav Zeira in order to defer the ruling.

In citing Rava, the Shulchan Aruch quotes the literal wording, whereas the Rema combines the concepts of drinking more than usual and of falling asleep through drink.

19. Shulchan Aruch and Rema, Orach Chaim 695 – How do we rule?

Shulchan Aruch - A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish between 'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordechai.'

Rema's note – There are those that say that one does not have to get drunk. Rather, he should drink more than usual (Kol Bo), and fall asleep. By sleeping he will not know the difference between

חַיִּיב אֵינִישׁ לְבִסּוּמֵי בְּפוּרֵיָא
עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אָרוּר הָמָן
לְבָרוּךְ מֹרְדֵכָי:

רמ"א - הגה וַיֵּשׁ אוֹמְרִים
דְּאֵין צְרִיךְ לְהִשְׁתַּכֵּר כָּל כֹּף
אֶלָּא שְׂיִשְׁתָּה יוֹתֵר מִלְּמוּדוֹ
(כל בו) וַיֵּשָׁן וּמִתּוֹךְ שְׂיִישָׁן

'cursed be Haman' and 'blessed be Mordechai'
(Maharil).

אֵינוּ יוֹדְעֵי בֵּין אָרוּר הַמֶּן לְבָרוּךְ
מְרֻדְכֵי (מהרי"ל).

Both the one who [drinks] a lot and the one who
[drinks] a little [is praiseworthy] as long as his
intention is for the sake of Heaven. (paraphrasing
the Mishnah on Menachot 110a)

וְאֶחָד הַמְרַבֵּה וְאֶחָד הַמִּמְעֵיט
וּבְלֵבָד שְׂיִכְוִין לְבוֹ לְשָׁמַיִם.

The conclusion of the Rema is of special importance: "Both the one who [drinks] a lot and the one who [drinks] a little [is praiseworthy] **as long as his intention is for the sake of Heaven.**"

Drinking on Purim is a unique mitzvah, but it also poses unique dangers. We hear, on the one hand, of beautiful anecdotes of spiritual, wise, and righteous rabbis pouring forth the deepest secrets of Torah when drunk on Purim. On the other hand, we also hear of the negative by-products of the not-so-pious getting "wasted" on Purim and compromising their moral standards. Sometimes results can be tragic, such as traffic accidents due to drunken driving, or people rushed away by ambulances to have their stomachs pumped.

Because of the possible negative effects, many contemporary authorities, including the Mishnah Berurah (695:4-5), advise not getting fully drunk. Those familiar with alcohol abuse on campuses are most outspoken against drinking.

20. Rabbi Dov Fischer, JewishJournal.com (March 11, 2011) – Contemporary issues of overindulgence in drinking

In recent years, American culture in general, and our teen culture in particular, has grown depressingly coarse. Witness television shows like "Jersey Shore" and "Skins" and a society where more people know the daily thoughts, so to speak, of Charlie Sheen and Lindsay Lohan than they do of their Congressional representative or the Poet Laureate of the United States. More rabbis than ever have called for bans on teen drinking during Purim and also have condemned the practice of certain outlier sects who would encourage drinking to the point of barfing on Main Street. Judaism despises drunkenness, and Rambam explicitly warned against it. (See, e.g., Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot De'ot 5:3; Hilkhot Sh'vitat Yom Tov 6:20).

It therefore devolves on the individual to know his or her limits, his or her values. If you are drinking some wine at a Mitzvah Purim Feast, a Seudat Purim marked by reciting brakhot (blessings) when washing your hands and eating bread, and then reciting more brakhot at the bentching prayers after the meal, that's cool. On the other hand, if it is not a Seudah feast of Mitzvah, but just one more excuse to go drinking and getting a "buzz," then such wine drinking would be forbidden as a coarse denigration of the extraordinary sanctity of the human soul that was created in the image of God. It would be a mockery and desecration of the miracle of Purim. And it would be a shame.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, a prominent spiritual leader of recent times, has written the following (AleI Shur, Vol. II, p. 468): “Rabbi Yisrael Salanter used to get extremely drunk on Purim. Yet in this state he would spend the entire day speaking novel words of Torah, with razor-sharp clarity and creative genius, in all areas of the Talmud. He used to call this, ‘giving the body a test,’ to see whether even his physical body was an embodiment of Divine wisdom...For us, who are small in Torah and in the service of God, it is enough to ‘drink more than usual, without getting so drunk’ (Rema, Orach Chaim 681:2). Let us guard the loftiness of the day and not let it turn into an empty waste of time.”

On account of the unfortunate scenes and accidents caused by drinking on Purim, involving both marrieds and singles, Rabbi Dr. Abraham Twerski (writing for the OU) cites from Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky that “Getting drunk on Purim is an *aveirah* (transgression), not a mitzvah.” It is crucial that a person know himself and know his own limits. The borderline between the beauty of Purim joy and the shame (and shameful) of a wasted day, or even worse, God forbid, can be very thin.

KEY THEMES OF SECTION II

- Rava makes a puzzling statement: “A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he cannot distinguish between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai.’” The Gemara follows it with the even more bewildering story of Rabbah slaughtering Rabbi Zeira at the Purim feast.
- According to one approach, the tragic anecdote comes to indicate that Rava’s statement is rejected from halachah. This is a minority view, and not accepted in halachah. Others, basing themselves on a general prohibition against drunkenness, explain that Rava did not intend that people should actually get drunk.
- A number of precedents, both biblical and Talmudic, indicate that becoming intoxicated is not an actual prohibition. This allows some authorities to understand Rava literally: One must get drunk on Purim. Yet, it remains forbidden to reach an extreme level of drunkenness, comparable to “the drunkenness of Lot.”
- As to the question of how much to drink, some maintain that one should drink more than usual, to the point of falling asleep through drinking. Others write that one should drink to the point where one’s mental faculties are no longer sharp.
- **Drinking on Purim must never bring a person to do anything dangerous to himself or others, or to do anything forbidden by the Torah or Jewish ethics.** Special care must be taken that youth do not drift into the excesses of Purim drinking.

SECTION III

When and What to Drink on Purim?

After considering the basic question of getting drunk on Purim, in the present section we will dwell briefly on the details. When, during the day of Purim, should a person get drunk (or drink more than usual)? What drinks are appropriate for the occasion?

Part A. When Should You Drink on Purim?

When should one drink on Purim – at night, during the day, both, or just during the *seudat* Purim (the Purim feast)? The Shulchan Aruch makes it clear (Orach Chaim 695:1) that although some feasting is in order on Purim night, the main Purim feast takes place during the day. But what about drinking? When should one “drink until he cannot distinguish between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’”?

The Rambam (Source 15 above – we quote the entire source here again) makes it clear that Purim’s drinking should be done during the Purim feast:

21. Rambam, Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Megillah ve’Chanukah 2:15 – Drinking is one component of the Purim feast.

What is the obligation of this [Purim] feast? It is that a person should eat meat and prepare as nice a meal as he is able to. He should also drink wine until he becomes drunk and falls asleep out of drunkenness.

כִּיצַד חֻבַּת סְעוּדָה זוֹ שְׂיֵאכַל
בְּשֵׁר וְיִתְקַן סְעוּדָה נְאֻחַה כְּפִי
אִשׁוּר תִּמְצָא יָדוֹ וְשׁוֹתָהּ יַיִן עַד
שְׂיִשְׁתַּכְּר וְיִרְדָּם בְּשִׁכְרוּתָהּ.

The Rambam’s position is that drinking on Purim is related to the mitzvah of having a Purim feast. It is not an independent mitzvah, but part of the feast.

On the other hand, Rabbi Yisrael Salanter is cited (Emek Bracha, Purim p. 126) as saying that the mitzvah entails drinking all day; we become exempt from drinking when we reach the stage of drunkenness (because somebody drunk is exempt from mitzvot).

According to this, Rava means to say that a person is obligated to drink – period – as long as he is obligated in mitzvot. If he is so drunk that he cannot tell the difference... then he is exempt from the mitzvah. Theoretically, if the drunk were to sober up before Purim terminates, he would once again find himself obligated to drink! Rabbi Salanter apparently understood that drinking on Purim is **an independent obligation**, and not a component of the Purim feast.

However, based on the Rambam (see also Tur, who notes the obligation of drinking in the context of the Purim feast), virtually all halachic authorities write that the obligation to drink applies specifically as part of the Purim feast. Certainly, there is

no requirement and no point of drinking at night.

Part B. What Should You Drink on Purim?

Are we obligated to drink specifically wine on Purim, or is any intoxicating beverage acceptable? Rashi, in his comment on Rava's statement (Source 5 above) explains that *livsumei* means to get drunk through **wine**. Wine is also explicitly mentioned by the Rambam (Source 15 – in most manuscripts of the Mishneh Torah), and by other authorities (see Rokeach, no. 237).

Why wine? If the goal of drinking on Purim was merely to enhance the day's joy, anything that brings a person to a state of joy-enhancing intoxication should be sufficient? The Tzror Hachaim (Rabbi Chaim son of Shmuel of Tudela, disciple of the Rashba, cited in Nitei Gavriel Chapter 73 footnote 5) answers our question.

22. Tzror Hachaim, Haderech Hashmini Midrash L'Purim pp. 120-121 – Why drink wine on Purim?

The reason they mentioned drinking [on Purim] is because the entire miracle, from the beginning to the end, came about through wine-banquets. First, the episode of Vashti took place in the context of a wine-banquet, until Esther was made queen. The tale of Haman, from beginning to end, involved wine-banquets. This is similar to Chanukah, where the miracle took place through oil and we therefore light candles. Similarly, on Purim, where the miracle took place through wine, we are obligated to get drunk on wine (*livsumei*) and to make a joyous celebration for our going from darkness to light, as it says, "For the Jews there was light and joy and happiness and honor" (Esther 8:16).

וְהַעֲנֵנוּ שֶׁהִזְכִּירוּ בְשֵׁתֵיהֶם, מִפְּנֵי
כִּי כָל הַנֶּס מִתְחִלָּה וְעַד סוּף
הָיָה בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן. מִתְחִלָּה עֲנִינוּ
וְשֵׁתֵי בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן עַד
שֶׁהַמְּלִיכוֹ אֶת אֶסְתֵּר. וְעֲנִינוּ הַמֶּן
בְּמִשְׁתֵּה הַיַּיִן מִתְחִלָּה וְעַד סוּף.
וְכִמוֹ שֶׁמִּצִּינוּ בְּחֻנְפָה שֶׁהַנֶּס
נֶעֱשֶׂה עַל יְדֵי הַשָּׂמֶן וּמִדְּלִיקוֹן
גֵּרוֹת, גַּם כֵּן בְּפֹרִים שֶׁהָיָה
הַנֶּס עַל יְדֵי הַיַּיִן חֲיִיבֵינוּ לְבִסּוּמֵי
וְלַעֲשׂוֹת שְׂמֵחָה שְׂיִצְאוּ מֵאֲפֵלָה
לְאוֹרָה. שְׁנֹאמַר: לְיְהוּדִים
הָיְתָה אוֹרָה וְשִׂמְחָה וְשִׂשׂוֹן וְיִקָּר
(אֶסְתֵּר ח:טז)

By transforming the Purim celebratory feast into a wine-banquet, we commemorate and publicize the miracle that took place on Purim.

This principle is also cited by the Chafetz Chaim (Biur Halachah, Orach Chaim 695). However, the Chafetz Chaim concludes: "Nonetheless, this [the obligation of drinking specifically wine] is only the preferred way to fulfill the mitzvah, but not a full obligation." If wine is unavailable, or if a person does not enjoy drinking wine, other alcoholic beverages are also acceptable.

**KEY
THEMES
OF
SECTION
III**

- According to the Rambam (and virtually all halachic authorities) the obligation to drink applies only during the Purim feast. Rabbi Yisrael Salanter apparently understood that there is an independent obligation to drink all day. **However, there is certainly no point of drinking at night.**
- A number of sources (Rashi, Rambam, and the Rokeach) mention drinking wine on Purim, not just any alcoholic beverage such as whiskey or beer.
- The halachic reason for such a unique mitzvah might be that on Purim we are not only commanded to be happy, but **to publicize God's miracle that took place through wine-banquets.** We do this by transforming our Purim feast into a wine-banquet. Purim is a day of mishteh vesimchah.

SECTION IV

Insights into Why We Drink on Purim

Rava's statement goes beyond teaching us how much to drink on Purim. His cryptic formulation affords us a glimpse at the special *avodat Hashem*, service of God, which we are able to do on Purim. The following sources, from a range of Jewish thinkers, help to deepen our understanding of serving God on Purim.

[See also the Morasha Shiur, Purim II – The Mitzvot of the Day, Section III, Getting Drunk on Purim.]

Part A. Why is Drinking Wine on Purim Different from Other Festivals?

All holidays – Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot – entail an obligation to drink. Clearly, the goal of this drinking is to achieve a state of joy.

23. Talmud, Pesachim 109a – What is the function of drinking wine on other holidays?

Rabbi Yehudah son of Beteira says: “When the Temple was standing [festival] joy was only achieved through [sacrificial] meat, for it says, ‘You should sacrifice peace offerings and eat them there and be joyous before the Lord your God’ (Devarim/Deuteronomy 27:7). But now that the Temple is not standing, [festival] joy is only achieved by means of wine, for it says, ‘Wine gladdens the heart of man’ (Tehillim 104:15).”

רבי יהודה בן בתירא אומר,
 “בזמן שביית המקדש קיים אין
 שמחה אלא בבשר, שנגאמר,
 וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם
 ושמחת לפני ה' אלקיך
 (דברים כז:ז). ועכשיו שאין בית
 המקדש קיים אין שמחה אלא
 ביינו, שנגאמר ויין ישמח לבב
 אנוש” (תהילים קד:טו).”

Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Solveitchik, the Brisker Rav, suggests that drinking wine has an additional dimension on Purim that it does not have on other holidays.

24. Brisker Rav, quoted in Emek Berachah p. 129 – How is drinking wine on Purim different from that of other holidays?

...The joy of Purim is different from that of all the other festivals. With regards to the joy of the other festivals we find nothing similar to Purim's requirement to get drunk through drinking wine until "you do not know the difference..." For on all of the other holidays the main mitzvah is to be joyous with God, and drinking wine is only a **means** to reach a state of happiness...But on Purim drinking wine is **itself** a mitzvah, as the verse states: "A day of wine-feasting and gladness" (Esther 9:22) ...

...הא דנשתנה שמחת פורים
מכל שאר השמחות של מועדים,
דלא מציינו בשום שמחה דין כזה
שיתחייב לבסומי בשתיית יין עד
דלא ידע, וכוליה - משום דבכל
המועדות עיקר מצות שמחה אינו
אלא לשמח בה, ובשר ויין אינו
אלא סיבה לעורר השמחה ... אבל
בפורים, פיון דכתיב משתה ושמחה
(אסתר ט:כב), נמצא שהמשתה
עצמה היא היא גוף המצוה ...

On other festivals, we use wine to enhance our joy; it is merely a means to an end. But the days of Purim are defined as "*yemei mishteh vesimchah*" – days of wine-feasting and joy – so that drinking is in itself a mitzvah.

Part B. Demonstrating our Dependence on God

On Yom Kippur we negate our bodies by means of fasting, enabling our spirits to cling to God. In contrast, on Purim we drink to the point where we negate our mind, leaving us physically vulnerable, totally and openly dependent on God.

25. Maharal, Or Chadash p. 221 – Drinking on Purim demonstrates our total dependence on God.

It is fitting that Yom Kippur should be a day of fasting, for when a person removes his body through fasting (that diminishes the body), he is able to cling to God ...

But the days of Purim are different, because God, may He be blessed, saved us from Haman ... In the days of Haman, when he wanted to decimate Israel and destroy their bodies, they had no physical assistance other than from God. Man is thus considered nothing at all, other than his God-given existence. Therefore we are obligated to drink on Purim until we do not know the difference between cursed be Haman and blessed be Mordechai. Only then, man has absolutely nothing of his own, and when he is considered nothing, his existence is totally from God.

...פי יום הכפורים ראוי שיהיה יום
צום, לפי שבאשר מסלק האדם
ממנו הגוף על ידי התענית שהוא
ממעט הגוף יש לאדם דבקות אל
השם יתברך ...

אבל ימי הפורים הוא עגן אחר פי
השם יתברך הציל אותם מהמון...
בימי המן שהיה רוצה לכלות את
ישׂראל ולאבד את גופם, ולא היה
להם עזר רק מן הש"י אשר הוא
מקיים האדם מצד שאינו נחשב
לכלום מצד עצמו רק פי קיומו הוא
מצד הש"י. ולכך חייב לבסומי
בפורים עד דלא ידע בין ארור המן
לברוך מרדכי, ואז אין דבר באדם
וכאשר אין האדם נחשב לכלום
קיומו הוא מן הש"י.

When Haman wanted to physically destroy the Jewish people, we were totally and openly dependent on God for salvation. Even today, our dependence on God

remains absolute. Therefore, by getting drunk on Purim and losing the ability to “be in control,” we demonstrate our dependence and trust that it is only God Who truly guides and sustains us.

Part C. Creating Jewish Unity

Among the most powerful themes of Purim is Jewish unification at a time of exile and dispersion. Haman told Achashverosh, “There is a nation which is dispersed and scattered...” (Esther 3:8). Disunity, indeed, is the tragic downfall of the Jewish nation. Prior to the salvation of Purim, the Jewish people rallied to Esther’s request to fast, pray, and unify.

Thus, the mitzvot commemorating Purim come to foster and strengthen Jewish unity: *mishloach manot* (sending gifts of food to friends), *matanot l’evyonim* (gifts to the poor), reading the Megillah together, and gathering for the Purim meal. The wine serves as a catalyst to draw us close to one another – “Great is drinking...for it brings together those who are distant” (Sanhedrin 103b).

26. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 205 – The festive meal is a way to create unity, which is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah afresh every year.

The Purim meal is referred to in the verse: “And these days should be remembered and celebrated by every generation [and] every family (Esther 9:28).” Rashi explains that the celebration is by means of: “people gathering together, and eating and drinking together ...”

The aim of the Purim meal is to unify everyone present, and for everyone in the group to bring happiness to his friend. Through this we pass on to future generations the unique re-acceptance of the Torah, which occurred in those days of Purim when: “[the nation was] like one man, with one heart” (Rashi, Shemot/Exodus 19:2, referring to the nation’s acceptance of the Written Torah on Mount Sinai).

סְעוּדַת פּוּרִים, כְּמִבְּאֵר בְּפֶסוּק
(אֶסְתֵּר ט, כח) “וְהַיָּמִים הָאֵלֶּה
נִזְכָּרִים וְנַעֲשִׂים בְּכָל דּוֹר וָדוֹר
מִשְׁפָּחָה וּמִשְׁפָּחָה ... מִבְּאֵר
רַשִׁי” “מִתְאַסְּפִים יַחַד וְאוֹכְלִים
וְשׂוֹתִים יַחַד ...”

סְעוּדַת פּוּרִים מְטַרְתָּה לְאַחַד
אֶת כּוֹלָם וְלִשְׂמוּחַ בְּצִוְתָא אִישׁ
עִם רֵעֵהוּ, וְעַל יְדֵי זֶה מִנְחִילִים
לְדוֹרוֹת אֶת הַקְּבִלָּה הַמְּחֻדָּשֶׁת
בְּיָמֵי הָהֵם, כְּאִישׁ אֶחָד בְּלֵב
אֶחָד.

27. Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, Siftei Chaim, Vol. II, p. 205 – All the mitzvot of the day – giving gifts of food to friends, giving gifts to the poor, and eating a festive meal with others – have a common purpose: to create unity among the Jewish people so that we should merit God’s deliverance.

Through this unity [generated by the mitzvot of the day] we will merit God’s deliverance in our days, as it occurred then. And in truth, this

וְעַל יְדֵי כֵּן זֹכִים אָנוּ לִישׁוּעַת ה'
בְּזַמְנוֹ הַזֶּה - כְּבִימֵי הָהֵם.
וְכִאֲמֹר, יִשׁוּעַת ה' זֹת תִּלְוֶינָה בְּנוֹ,

salvation is dependent on us. For when we are unified and bonded like one entity, and we remove our selfishness for the purpose of a common goal – which is to fulfill the Will of God – then we merit God's salvation as in those days.

כְּשֶׁאֲנֵנוּ מְאֻחָדִים וּמְאֻחָדִים
כְּחֻטְיָבָה אַחַת, מְבַטְלִים אֶת
רְצוֹנֵתֵינוּ הָאִשְׁרִיִּים לְמִטְוָה
אַחַת בְּלֶבֶד - רְצוֹן ה', עַל יְדֵי
זֹאת זוֹכִים לִישׁוּעַת ה' כְּבָיָמִים
הֵהֱם בְּיָמֵינוּ הַזֶּה.

On Purim we commemorate the unity displayed by Persian Jewry, resulting in a miraculous salvation. By understanding the essence of the day and observing the mitzvot of Purim, we hope that we, too, will create Jewish unity and merit God's deliverance.

Part D. Revealing Inner Secrets

The Talmud (Eruvin 65a) teaches that when a person drinks, otherwise hidden aspects of his personality are revealed: וַיֵּצֵא סוּד - וְנִכְנַס יַיִן וַיֵּצֵא סוּד - “Wine enters and the secret comes out.”

28. Rabbi Mordechai Becher, Gateway to Judaism, p. 182 – Drinking allows one to reveal his hidden self, just as God revealed His hidden Presence on Purim.

Consuming alcohol mirrors the events of Purim in another way as well ... Intoxication causes a person to reveal elements of his inner self that are usually hidden. What transpired on Purim revealed the love of God for the Jewish people...which had been hidden during the time of the Persian Exile.

God's love of the Jewish People, hidden in years of exile, was revealed on Purim. The very name of the Scroll of Esther – Megillat Esther – literally means “revealing the hidden.” Purim reveals the secret of the eternity of the Jewish People – a secret latent in the innermost point of every Jew.

29. Rabbi Yehoshua Pfeffer, “The Drunken World of Purim” in forthcoming *Beneath the Surface* – Purim reveals the secret of existence – the secret of God's providence that keeps the Jewish People alive in spite of everything.

Translated literally, “*Megillat Esther*” is “*the revelation of the hidden.*” On one hand the Megillah is termed Igeret (Esther 9:29), implying the simple worldly story that it presents. The name of God, by contrast with every other holy script, is entirely absent. On the other it is a *Sefer*, a book that joins the great ranks of Holy Scripture.

Megillat Esther allows the revelation of innermost depth even in a vessel of superficial, earthly expression. The Name of Hashem is hidden; yet His presence, “behind the scenes,” is everywhere.

Our obligation is to drink wine. After the Temple was destroyed the order of nature closed the door on Divine revelation. Our relationship with God was lost from sight. Wine, however, the magical potion that reveals hidden secrets

outwardly, promises that some level of revelation remains.

While adults drink wine to the point of intoxication, the custom of children is to dress up in costumes. The message is the same. Adult and child alike personify the essence of the day. Thus the mask that nature places on the world is somewhat lifted. Together with the Jewish People, the entire world, as it were, gets drunk.

In its drunken state, one thing – one thing alone – is clear: The eternity of the Jewish People. No matter how bad things look. No matter how lost the cause appears to be. Forever.

The secret of existence is God. His revelation comes by means of the Jewish People. Both are eternal. On Purim, we hear a whisper of the secret.

Part E. Getting High from the Day of Purim Itself!

Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky underscores the lofty nature of the day of Purim, understanding Rava's instruction to "get drunk" on Purim as referring to becoming immersed in the wealth of spiritual riches available on this day.

Purim is compared to Yom Kippur – it is a day of receiving the Torah, and a time to eradicate the evil of Amalek. It holds the opportunity for each person to perfect the three essential relationships for which we are created – between man and God, man and other people, and man and himself.

30. Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, *Netivot Shalom, Purim*. pp. 57-58 – On Purim one becomes intoxicated in Purim itself.

[Summarized]

Behold, this obligation is among the wondrous aspects of Purim. For the day of Purim is auspicious and very holy, containing many lofty components. It is a day "like" Yom Kippur, a day of receiving the Torah since the Jewish nation willingly re-accepted the Torah, which is a higher level even than Sinai. It is also a day of eradicating Amalek. Furthermore, we give tzedakah (charity) to anyone who requests (and likewise God responds to any of our requests). Clearly, understanding the essence of this day requires tremendous thought, as does [grasping] how this relates to the obligation to get inebriated on Purim...

The Gemara doesn't say '*livsumei*' with wine, rather '*livsumei*' in Purim – meaning that one

חייב איניש לבסומי בפוריא עד
דלא ידע. הנה חיוב זה הוא מן
הדברים המפלאים בפורים, שהרי
יום פורים הוא יום גדול וקדוש עד
מאוד, והרבה ענינים נשגבים
כלולים בו. שהוא כיום פורים,
יום קבלת התורה דהדר קבלה
ברצון, היינו במדרגה יותר גבוהה
ממעמד הר סיני. וגם עת מחיית
עמלק. ובו כל הפושט יד נותנים
לו. ולכאורה דרוש לכל זה הרבה
הרבה ישוב הדעת, ואיך זה
מתישב עם החיוב לבסומי
בפוריא. ...

דלא אמרו לבסומי בין אלא
בפוריא, שישתכר מהפורים

should get intoxicated **from Purim itself**, as in the connotation of (Yeshaya/Isaiah 51:21) “Drunk, but not from wine.” One becomes drunk on the elevated revelations of Purim in the perspective of (Shemot 30:10) “Once a year.”

Purim is divided into three aspects, corresponding to the three divisions of perfection in the service of God, as the Maharal writes: “Perfection in service of God includes our relationship with God, with other people, and within ourselves.” All three of these areas include an aspect that is like “blessed be Mordechai” (positive) and another that is like “cursed be Haman” (negative). A person has to get so “drunk” from the holiness of the day that he cannot tell the difference between the two.

Reading the Megillah reflects completion with one's Creator. There are times when the Holy One, blessed be He, helps a Jew, when his mind and heart are open and he feels close to his God – These are “blessed be Mordechai” times. But there are also extremely dark times, when a person feels he has become dreadfully distant from God, where there is obscurity both in physical and spiritual matters, to the degree where he feels he has been totally cast out (God forbid) from God's Presence, and his whole existence is one of “cursed be Haman.” This is a Jew's most difficult situation.

But on Purim a person must get drunk until he cannot tell between “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordechai.” He must draw from Purim's great reserves of joy until he feels that there is no difference between the times of closeness to God and the times he feels distanced and rejected.

Likewise concerning a person's relationship with others... On Purim a person must become so “drunk” that he cannot tell between “cursed be Haman” [foes and adversaries] and “blessed

עצמו בְּחִינַת [יִשְׁעֵיהוּ נֹא כֹא]
שְׁכָרֵת וְלֹא מֵיַיִן, כִּי אִם מִכֶּל
הַגְּלוּיִים הַנְּשֻׁגָבִים שֶׁל פּוּרִים שֶׁהֵם
בְּבַחֲוֵי אַחַת בְּשָׁנָה.

דְּהֵנָּה עֲנִינֵי הַפּוּרִים מִתְחַלְקִים לְגִ'
חֻלְקִים כְּפִנְגֵד ג' חֻלְקֵי הַשְּׁלִימוֹת
בְּעִבּוּדֵת ה', כְּמוֹ שֶׁכָּתַב הַמַּהֲרַ"ל
דְּלִשְׁלִימוֹת עִבּוּדֵת ה' פּוֹלְטֵת שְׁלֹם
עִם בּוֹרְאוֹ שְׁלֹם עִם חֲבֵרָיו וְשְׁלֹם
עִם עַצְמוֹ. וּבְכַוֵּן יֵשׁ בְּחִינַת בְּרוּךְ
מְרֻדְכֵי וּבְחִינַת אֲרוּר הָמָן, אֲשֶׁר
חַיִּיב אֵינִישׁ לְבִסּוּמֵי בְּפוּרִיָא
מְקַדּוּשֵׁת הַיּוֹם עַד דְּלֹא יֵדַע בֵּין
אֲרוּר הָמָן לְבְרוּךְ מְרֻדְכֵי.

קְרִיאַת הַמְּגִלָּה הִיא מְכַלֵּל
הַשְּׁלִימוֹת עִם בּוֹרְאוֹ. דְּהֵנָּה יֵשׁ
זְמַנִּים שֶׁהַקְּדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹזֵר
לְיִהוּדֵי שְׂמֹחוֹ וְלְבוֹ פְתוּחִים
וּמְרַגֵּשׁ קְרוֹב לְאַלְקֵינוּ, בְּבַחֲוֵי
בְּרוּךְ מְרֻדְכֵי. וְיִשְׁנֵם זְמַנִּים
חֲשׂוּכִים בְּיוֹתֵר, שֶׁמְרַגֵּשׁ כִּי
נִתְרַחַק מְאֹד מֵהַשֵּׁם יִתְבָּרֵךְ,
שֶׁנִּמְצָא בְּהַסְתֵּר בְּעֲנִינֵים גְּשָׁמִיִּים
וּבְעֲנִינֵים רוּחָנִיִּים, וְעַד שֶׁנִּדְמָה לוֹ
שֶׁהַשֵּׁלֵךְ לְגַמְרֵי חֵס וְשְׁלֹם
מִמְחִיצָתוֹ שֶׁל הַקַּב"ה, וְכֵן
מְצִיאוֹתוֹ בְּבַחֲוֵי אֲרוּר הָמָן. זֶהוּ
הַמְצָב הַקָּשָׁה בְּיוֹתֵר לְיִהוּדֵי.

אָכֵן בְּפוּרִים חַיִּיב אֵינִישׁ לְבִסּוּמֵי
עַד דְּלֹא יֵדַע בֵּין אֲרוּר הָמָן לְבְרוּךְ
מְרֻדְכֵי, שֶׁיִּשְׁאָב מֵהַפּוּרִים שְׂמֻחָה
עֲצוּמָה עַד שֶׁיִּרְגֵּשׁ בְּלִבּוֹ שֶׁאֵין כָּל
הַבְּדֵל בֵּין הָעֵתִים שֶׁבָּהֶם הוּא
מְרַגֵּשׁ אֶת עַצְמוֹ קְרוֹב לְהַשֵּׁם
יִתְבָּרֵךְ לְבִין הָעֵתִים שֶׁבָּהֶם
מְרַגֵּשׁ מְרַחַק וְנִדְחָה.

וּבְכֵן בְּחֻלְקֵי שֶׁל שְׁלֹם עִם חֲבֵרָיו
יֵשׁ בְּחֵי אֲרוּר הָמָן וּבְחִינַת בְּרוּךְ
מְרֻדְכֵי. יֵשׁ חֲבֵרִים שֶׁמְרַגֵּשׁ כִּי הֵם
קְרוֹבִים לְלִבּוֹ וְכִי הֵם הַגּוֹנִים

be Mordechai” [close friends]. This is the idea of giving gifts to one another (*mishloach manot*), to increase friendship and camaraderie... This is an exceedingly elevated level, to love all in whatever situation they are.

The idea applies even to perfection within one's own self... On Purim a person must become so “drunk” that he cannot tell between “cursed be Haman” [base physical pursuits] and “blessed be Mordechai” [elevated spiritual pursuits]. For the power of Purim is such that it makes no difference whether he is involved in Torah or service of God, or he is involved in physical activities – since the entire world is God's acquisition.

As the Maggid of Mezritch said, the world is full of methods of acquiring (*kinyanim*) a connection with God. Just as one can connect to God through Torah and direct service, so one can attain a connection with him through physical matters. We believe that everything was created for the glory of God. Through this approach a person reaches self-perfection.

וְרֵאוּיִים בְּבַחֲנֵינָת בְּרוּךְ מְרֻדְכֵי. וַיֵּשׁ שְׂרוּאָה אֶת חֲבֵרָיו בְּבַחֲי אָרוּר הֶמֶן, אִם מַחֲמַת שֶׁהוּא בְּעַצְמוֹ בְּמַצֵּב יְרוּד וּמְשׁוּם כֶּה נְדָמָה לוֹ עַל אַחֲרִים שְׂאִינָם בְּסֹדֵר, אוֹ כְּאִילוֹ בְּאַמַּת אֵינָם הַגּוֹנִים. וּבְפוּרִים חַיִּיב אָדָם לְבִסּוּמֵי עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אָרוּר הֶמֶן לְבְרוּךְ מְרֻדְכֵי, שֶׁזֶה עֲנֵן מְשֻׁלּוּחַ מְנוּת אִישׁ לְרַעְהוּ לְהַרְבּוֹת הִרְעוּת וְהִדְדוּת. וּכְפִי הָעוֹלָה מְדַבְּרֵי חַז”ל וְמָה שֶׁכָּתַב הַרְמַב”ם בְּמִצְוֹת וְאַהֲבַת לְרַעַה כְּמוֹה, חַיִּיב אָדָם לְאַהֲבֹב כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּגוֹפּוֹ, שֶׁזֶה מְדַרְגָּה עֲלִיּוֹנָה בְּיוֹתֵר לְאַהֲבֹב כְּגוֹפּוֹ כָּל אֶחָד וְאֶחָד בְּאִיזָה מַצֵּב שֶׁהוּא.

וְכֵן יֵשׁ בְּפוּרִים עֲנֵן שֶׁלֵּם עִם עַצְמוֹ. שֶׁתִּפְקִיד הַיּוֹם מַחֲיֵת עִמְלֶק בְּסוּר מִרַע וְהִדָּר קְבִלוֹה בְּרִצּוֹן בְּעֵשֶׂה טוֹב. וְגַם בְּזֶה נֶאֱמַר דְּחַיִּיב לְבִסּוּמֵי עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אָרוּר הֶמֶן לְבְרוּךְ מְרֻדְכֵי. דְּפֹאֲשֵׁר אָדָם אֵינוֹ שֶׁלֵּם עִם עַצְמוֹ בְּבַחֲנֵינָת מֵאַמַּר הַפְּתוּב (תְּהִלִּים לַח) אֵין שְׁלוֹם בְּעַצְמֵי, אִזּוֹ בְּעֶסְקוֹ בְּתוֹרָה וְעַבּוּדָה הוּא בְּבַחֲנֵינָת בְּרוּךְ מְרֻדְכֵי. וְאִילוֹ בְּעַת עֶסְקוֹ בְּעֲנֵנִים הַגִּשְׁמִיִּים וְשִׁקּוּעַ בְּתַאוּתֵי הַחֲמֻרֵי הַרְיָהוּ בְּבַחֲי אָרוּר הֶמֶן.

וּבְפוּרִים חַיִּיב אֵינִישׁ לְבִסּוּמֵי עַד דְּלֹא יָדַע בֵּין אָרוּר הֶמֶן לְבְרוּךְ מְרֻדְכֵי, שֶׁמִּפְנֵי הַפוּרִים לֹא יִהְיֶה הַפְּרֵשׁ אֲצִלוֹ בֵּין אִם עוֹסֵק בְּעֲנֵנֵי תוֹרָה וְעַבּוּדָה אוֹ שֶׁעוֹסֵק בְּעֲנֵנֵי הַגִּשְׁמִיִּים, כִּי מְלֶאכֶה הָאָרֶץ קִנְיָנָה, כְּמֵאֲמַר הַרְבֵּי הַקְּדוּשׁ הַמַּגִּיד מִמְזוֹרֵינָּו וְזָרְנוֹ יָגוּ עֲלֵינוּ, שֶׁהָעוֹלָם מְלֵא בְּקִנְיָנִים שֶׁאֶפְשָׁר עַל יָדָם לְקַנּוֹתוֹ יְתִבְרָה. כְּמוֹ שֶׁאֶפְשָׁר לְקַנּוֹתוֹ עַל יְדֵי תוֹרָה וְעַבּוּדָה, כֶּה אֶפְשָׁר לְקַנּוֹתוֹ בְּשַׁעַה שֶׁעוֹסְקִים בְּעֲנֵנֵי הַגִּשְׁמִיִּים וּמֵאֲמִינִים שֶׁהַכֵּל בָּרָא לְכְבוֹדוֹ, שֶׁאִזּוֹ מְגִיעַ הָאָדָם לְשִׁלְמוֹת עִם עַצְמוֹ.

**KEY
THEMES
OF
SECTION
IV**

- Drinking on Purim includes a dimension beyond that of other holidays. On Purim not only does wine bring us to joy – as a means to an end – but we define Purim as “*yemei mishteh vesimchah*” – days of wine-feasting and joy. Drinking wine publicizes the Purim miracle that came about through wine banquets.
- According to the Maharal, drinking involves the negation of the mind. On Yom Kippur we negate our bodies to bring our spirits closer to God. On Purim, as we celebrate the salvation of our physical bodies, we drink to neutralize our mind. As a mere body we are purely and openly dependent on God, and He, so to speak, personally uplifts us.
- Drinking wine furthermore brings about national unity. Purim celebrates the completion of the receiving of the Torah. The unity of Israel is a prerequisite for receiving the Torah, and this is expressed in *mishloach manot* (giving gifts to one another) and in the closeness achieved by drinking – “drinking brings hearts closer.”
- Wine also reveals inner secrets. The essence of Purim reveals the inner secret of God’s providence and direction over the world, and in particular His eternal protection of the Jewish People. Adults drink, children dress up, and this secret of Purim shines through the mask that hides it throughout the year.
- The Netivot Shalom reads Rava’s statement as meaning that a person must become drunk from the day of Purim itself! The spiritual energy of Purim is so great, that we become intoxicated with its elevation. In every realm of our lives – our relationship with God, with people, and with our own selves, we lose the regular distinctions between positive and negative.

**CLASS
SUMMARY**
How does the function of drinking on Purim contrast with its function on other Jewish holidays?

On other holidays we have a mitzvah to be joyous – *Vesamachta bechagecha*. Wine is a means to reach that joyous state. However, on Purim we also focus on the drinking itself (though, like the other holidays, there is also a mitzvah to be joyous on Purim). To publicize God’s Purim miracle that came about through wine-banquets, we transform our own Purim feast into a wine-banquet.

What does Rava mean by “until he cannot tell between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai’”?

There is a range of opinions on this. Some take it literally, as a way expressing a degree of drunkenness. On the other extreme are those who point out the choice of the word *livsumej*, which might indicate getting tipsy, not drunk. Others understand that Rava’s choice alludes to a low level of drunkenness – either the inability to calculate the numerical value of *arur Haman* and *baruch Mordechai*, or getting mixed up in a song that ends with those two refrains.

What are the halachic guidelines for drinking on Purim?

Halachic authorities take different approaches to the question of how much to drink and how intoxicated one should become. Certainly, one should not get “stone drunk,” and many recommend refraining from drunkenness altogether, drinking instead until one falls asleep. As we know, irresponsible drinking can lead to terrible consequences, and this applies on Purim no less than during the year. Moreover, drinking on Purim is no excuse to do anything the Torah prohibits, to harm oneself or others, or to allow for any lapse in morality, modesty, or proper conduct.

When and what should one drink?

The correct time for drinking is specifically during the Purim Feast. Certainly, there is no point in drinking at night. It is best to drink specifically wine, which recalls the wine-banquets by which the miracle of Purim came about. One who does not like wine may drink other beverages.

What is the underlying meaning behind drinking on Purim?

A number of our great thinkers have suggested that on Purim we diminish the importance of seichel and daat, our intellectual faculties. We neutralize our higher faculties so that the physical aspect, which was saved from destruction on Purim, comes to the fore (Maharal). Purim can bring a person great elevation, and drinking can reveal a person's inner self, just as the day of Purim reveals the secret of God's protection of His nation. Drinking also brings us together. Jews drinking together at a Purim feast are united in their dedication to serving God. According to the Netivot Shalom, the highest level is for a person to get drunk without drinking, becoming intoxicated by the very elevation of the day of Purim itself.

RECOM- MENDED ADDITIONAL READING

Morasha Syllabus

“Purim II: The Mitzvot of the Day,” especially “Section III. Getting Drunk on Purim,” available online at:

<http://nleresources.com/nle-morasha-syllabus/jewish-calendar/purim-ii-the-mitzvot-of-the-day/>

Hebrew

נטעי גבריאל פורים סימן עג - “מצות שתיית יין, עמ' ת' - ת”ו

שכרות בהלכה, באתר “עולמות”, דפי מקורות ושיעור

available online at <http://olamot.net/shiur/> שכרות-בהלכה

פחד יצחק, פורים, מאמר לא

Audio

Audio shiurim about drinking on Purim available on www.yutorah.org/purim/

Rabbi Elchanan Adler: Ad Delo Yada and Shiras Ha'azinu

Rabbi Chaim Brovender: Why Get Drunk on Purim?

Rabbi Shalom Rosner: Drinking On Purim

Rabbi Ari Jacobson: Chayiv einish libusumei - Accommodating Excess

Rabbi Zvi Romm: Getting Drunk on Purim

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg: The Connection Between Costumes and Drinking on Purim

Articles

"Purim and Pikuach Nefesh," by Rabbi Howard Jachter, available online at:

<http://www.koltorah.org/ravj/purimdrinking.htm>

Dr. David Pelcowitz, "Preparing Your Teens for Purim," available on line at <http://blogs.yu.edu/news/2011/03/09/preparing-your-teen-for-purim/>

Links for Judaism's stance on Marijuana Use:

Rebbetzin Feigie Twerski on "Getting High": <http://www.aish.com/f/rf/Getting-High.html>

Chabad Ask the Rabbi: http://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/507780/jewish/What-is-the-Jewish-stance-on-marijuana.htm

Rabbi Jachter: http://koltorah.org/ravj/15-17_The_Prohibition_to_Smoke_3.htm

Medicinal Marijuana Use: <http://www.torah.org/features/secondlook/marijuana.html>

"Drinking Games: How much people drink may matter less than how they drink it," by Malcolm Gladwell, New Yorker Magazine, Annals of Anthropology, February 15, 2010, available online at http://www.gladwell.com/2010/2010_02_15_a_drinking.html