

Letter from the Community Rabbis regarding Purim

The story of Purim begins by telling us the humorous story of Ahashverosh's party. Ahashverosh throws a lavish 6-month drinking festival, showing off his wealth to his entire empire. At the very end of the party, Ahashverosh, in his drunken stupor, kills his most beloved wife Vashti in front of everybody. One of the lessons here is simple; when one is drunk, he ends up making decisions that ultimately embarrass himself publicly.

In recent years, the issue of alcohol consumption on Purim has been raised to the forefront across Modern Orthodox Jewish communities in United States. Many Jews, unaware of what Purim is all about, have taken drinking to reckless levels under the pretense that it is a "mitzva," and therefore religiously mandated. This, of course, is completely false.

In the Talmud, as well as in all the major sources of Jewish law, the mitzva of drinking on Purim only exists in the context of the meal during Purim day with one's family. There is no mitzva to drink at night, or in any context outside the meal with one's family during the day. Furthermore, the mitzva is only to drink specifically wine (and not any other hard alcohol). This is what the mitzva of drinking on Purim is – to have an enjoyable "Lechaim" on wine with one's family during the Purim meal – not in a way where an individual will become smashed or wasted, but in a way that will enrich the family meal and perhaps make the individual bit drowsy to the point that he will fall asleep (as drinking wine during a meal will often do). Those who are legally underage should not be drinking. Needless to say, anyone who is drinking should be wary of their alcohol consumption and should not be driving after drinking during the meal.

As proud members of the Mashadi community, we should strive to uphold the great values that we inherited from our ancestors and make us united and special. These include Khejaulat, humbleness, and always conducting ourselves in a decent manner. These values are "a tree of life" for those who cling to them. In the Purim story, exaggerated alcoholism is a key symbol of the way Ahashverosh lived his life, and the consequences are obvious. Our Jewish leaders established for us to drink during the meal of Purim, with our families, during the daytime – not so that we can succumb to the ways of Ahashverosh, but so that we can represent the moderate, enjoyable, dignified way of celebrating life. This must be our model and guiding light as we celebrate our holidays.

May this year's Purim be a happy and safe Purim for our entire community.

Sincerely,

  
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