

### Is it a mitzvah to get drunk on Purim?

There are four mitzvot of Purim as mentioned in the Megillah: 1) read Megillat Esther, 2) share a Purim *seudah* or festive meal, 3) send *mishloach manot*, gift baskets of food, to friends and neighbors and 4) give *matanot l'evyonim* or charity to the poor. So where do we get the idea of drinking until we are inebriated on Purim?

In Talmud Tractate Megillah 7b we read, “Rava said: A person is obligated to drink on Purim until he does not know the difference between ‘cursed be Haman’ and ‘blessed be Mordechai.’” Pretty much all authorities interpret this mitzvah to be actually drinking alcohol, though they disagree on how inebriated one must become. Opinions range from having a little and going to sleep (you can’t tell the difference between cursing Haman and blessing Mordechai in your sleep) to drinking more than is one’s custom, but how much more is up to you.

The answer though, is that yes, it is a mitzvah to drink on Purim. However, the real point, I think, is not to be so drunk that you turn stupid, as Rava’s teaching might imply. Rather, you should drink in the spirit that weighty issues like blessings and curses and Haman and Mordechai are lifted off our souls for at least a little while. For this one day of the year, we can feel pure joy without the turmoil of “heavy” issues weighing us down. It is true that alcohol is one way that some people can achieve that state of mind, but I would suggest that there are others – having a party, attending a concert, being with good friends and family doing something fun together or just having a good laugh (come to our Purim spiel Wednesday night to get that one in). If drinking is not your thing, finding another path to relaxed joy on Purim is still your obligation. Be happy – on Wednesday night and Thursday. It’s a mitzvah!