

## *Wine from Havdalah, Women and Beards*

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### Introduction

That women do not drink wine from *havdalah* is a well established fact; so too is the “reason”: they will grow unwanted hair, either a mustache or chest hair, depending on the received wisdom. Let it be stated at the outset: women not drinking wine from *havdalah* has bona fide, albeit late, halachik sources. The consequence of such drinking, however, is found nowhere in traditional sources. And yet it is a very widespread legend amongst a broad swath of the Jewish landscape. This well known “old-wives tale” that women and girls who drink wine from *havdalah* grow unwanted hair makes us question the premise that they should not drink wine from *havdalah*. What is the truth about women and *havdalah*, women and drinking *havdalah* wine, and where did such a strange notion come from? This paper will discuss the sources regarding women and the *havdalah* ceremony, women and *havdalah* wine, and then make an attempt at finding a “source,” however tenuous, for the “hair legend.”

*Motzei Shabbat* includes several mitzvot from which women generally absent themselves. These include *kiddush levana* and *me-lava malka*. Indeed, women are usually viewed as exempt from *Kiddush Levana* (*MA* 70:1, 296:11, 426: intro; *MB* 106:4; but see Rav Avigdor Nebentzahl, *b'Yitzchak Yekarei* on this *MB*), and a variety of reasons are suggested for why they customarily do not say it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The *Shla* (*Shnei Luchot HaBrit* [Amsterdam 1648] *Shaar HaOtiyot*, *Kedusha* 29) does not discourage it, but simply explains why women in general do not recite *kiddush levana*. He explains that through Eve's sin the moon received a defect (loss of light), and women as a group are therefore col-

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On the other hand, they are encouraged to partake of *melava Malka*, although there seems to be a laxity in its observance (possibly due to poverty) that goes back at least to the time of the *Pri Megadim* in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (*Pri Megadim, Eshel Avraham* 300). Another Saturday night activity they avoid, in this case with an unusual explanation, is drinking from the *havdalah* wine. There seems to be a widespread custom that women do not drink from the *havdalah* wine. The popular explanation for this is that if a woman drinks from the *havdalah* wine she will grow unwanted hair. While the custom that women do not drink from *havdalah* wine is attested to in many later halachik sources, an interesting variety of reasons are suggested, none of which relate to unwanted consequences of such drinking.

### *Havdalah*

In general, although women are exempt from active, time-bound mitzvot, there are many exceptions, such as if the action mitzvah is linked to a refraining mitzvah. That is the case with *kiddush* on Shabbat. Although it is an active time-bound mitzvah, because it is linked in the verse to not violating the Shabbat, women are as obligated in the mitzvah of *kiddush* as men are (*Berachos* 20b; *SA OC* 271:2). *Havdalah* is often associated with *kiddush* and thought of as the other bookend to Shabbat, and indeed that is how the Rambam (*Shabbat* 29:1) viewed it. He understood that they are both derived from the same verse and thus women are as obligated in *havdalah* as men. *Maggid Mishna* comments that Rambam appears to view *hav-*

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lectively embarrassed to participate in a ceremony involving the moon. Even though they subsequently “repaired” this “sin” by not worshipping the Golden Calf and thereby being granted the holiday of Rosh Chodesh, nonetheless, they are still ashamed of their earlier sin.

Rav Hershel Schachter (*MiPineei HaRav*, 2001, pp. 81-82) notes that the gemara (*Sanhedrin* 42a) explicitly states that women said *kiddush levana*. Furthermore, in a creative twist he explains why *kiddush levana* may not be a *mitzvas aseh she’hazman gerama* and thus women may actually be obligated in its recital.

For a comprehensive discussion of women and *kiddush levana* see Rav David Auerbach, *Halichos Beisab* (5743), 16:10 and related footnotes (pp. 238–242).

*dalab* as biblical, but even if it is of rabbinic origin, women are obligated. The *SA* (OC 296:8) records both the position of Rambam and the dissenting opinion of Rash MiShantz that women are exempt from *havdalah*.<sup>2</sup> Rash MiShantz holds that *havdalah* is a rabbinic obligation that the rabbis linked to a verse, but for which they did not obligate women. There is a debate in the *rishonim* over whether *havdalah* is biblical or rabbinic. All those who hold the former, obligate women, while amongst the later some do and some don't. *Mishna Berurah* (296:34) writes that the rationale behind the position exempting women is that because *havdalah* is recited after Shabbat, it is viewed not as a Shabbat mitzvah in which women would be obligated, but rather as a typical time-bound commandment from which women are exempt.

From the language of the *Shulchan Aruch* it seems he holds that women are obligated in *havdalah*. However, the lingering doubt as to whether women are obligated in *havdalah* implies that it is preferable for a man who has already fulfilled his obligation to not recite it for women only (*MB* 296:36; *Yabia Omer* 4: OC: 23-24 and 6:48:12; *Yechave Da'as* 4:27; cf. *AH* OC 296:5) and that a woman should preferably hear it from a man (*Rema* OC 296:8), although if she cannot find a man to recite it she may certainly say it herself (*MB* 296:35; *Shaar HaTziyun* 296:34; *SA HaRav* 296:19; *Chayei Adam*, *Hilchos Shabbat*, 8:12; cf. the dissenting opinion in *Kaf HaChayim* 296:55). Indeed the prevalent custom is that women do recite *havdalah* on their own when there is no man available to recite it.<sup>3</sup> This follows the opinion of the *Bach* (OC 296) that although they are exempt they may recite it. He holds that even if there is a man present from whom the woman can hear it, she may recite it herself. *Magen Avraham* (296:11) cites, but rejects, an opinion that not only are women exempt, they may not voluntarily recite it because the Ashkenazi rule that women may recite a *beracha* over

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<sup>2</sup> Rabenu Shimshon MiShantz, an early French Tosafist (1150–1230), cited in *Orchot Chaim*, *Hilchos Havdalah*, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Chida (*Birkei Yosef*, 296:7) rules that women are biblically obligated and therefore a man who has already recited *havdalah* may recite it for women.

time-bound mitzvot applies only to the *beracha* over an action mitzvah, but not when the *beracha* is the entirety of the mitzvah.

*Taz* (296:7) explains that *Rema* rules that women should not say *havdalah* because he permits them to say a *beracha* only over a biblical mitzvah from which they are exempt, not over a wholly rabbinic one, and he rejects the position of his father-in-law, the Bach. *Pri Megadim* (*Mishbetzos Zahav* 296:7) has a problem with this explanation, because women do recite *berachos* over time-bound rabbinic mitzvot such as *Hallel* on *Rosh Chodesh* and *lulav* on *Chol HaMoed*. Likewise the *Aruch HaShulchan* (OC 296:5) raises a question on this *Taz* from *lulav* on the last six days of *Sukkos*.

### ***Havdalah* Wine**

*Magen Avraham* (*Orach Chaim* 296:4) cites a custom in the name of the *Shla* (Rabbi Isaiah Horowitz, d. 1630), that women do not drink *havdalah* wine. This should not be seen as too strange, because unlike by *kiddush*, there is a custom not to share the *havdalah* cup, but rather the one reciting *havdalah* drinks the entire cup (*MA* 296:4 in the name of *Shibolei HaLeket*, *Hilchos Shabbat*, 74; also cited in *Mishna Berurah* 296:6). The reason proffered for drinking the entire cup is not related to any deep mysteries, but rather to the need to make a *beracha acharona*.<sup>4</sup> This custom, for women not to drink the *havdalah* wine, is cited by numerous later sources.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (96:7) states that the person reciting *havdalah* should drink all the wine by himself—implying no one else, male or female, drinks the wine. This is clearly only *l'chatchila*, because he follows this by noting that the custom is for women not to drink. The *MA* 296:4 and *Mishna Berura* (296:6) also mention that the one making *havdalah* usually drinks the whole cup without giving to family members in order to ensure that he drinks enough to make a *beracha* after drinking the wine. There are various opinions, some cited in *Kaf HaChaim* 296:15, about whether it is preferable for the one making *havdalah* to drink the entire cup or to share it with the other household members.

<sup>5</sup> For example: *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* (96:7); *Mishna Berurah* 296:6; *Kaf HaChaim* 296:14; *Elya Rabba* (s"v 4); *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* Toledano (164:11), all of whom cite this custom. Note that it is not mentioned in *SA HaRav*.

The reason originally mentioned by the *Shla*<sup>6</sup> is that because the *Eitz Hada'at*, the tree of knowledge, was a grape vine<sup>7</sup> from which Chava squeezed wine in order to separate from man, a wish she was granted via *dam niddah*, menstrual blood, she does not partake of the *havdalah* (separation) wine.

*Shla* appears to be the earliest source to mention women not drinking, and he states his reason. However, later authorities, who in droves accepted the practice, offered a variety of additional or alternative reasons. *Bigdei Yesha* (Rav Yeshaya Veiner, Prague, 1777 [reprinted Israel, 1970]; 296:4)<sup>8</sup> offers a related reason. He suggests that the 39 prohibited forms of work on Shabbat are parallel to the 39 curses that came because of the snake, and *havdalah* comes to permit work that was caused by Chava and what she did to the world. Hence women should avoid drinking the wine that is a reminder of her sin.

An alternate, purely halachik reason has been offered for this custom. Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank (*Har Tzvi OC*: 154:2) quotes Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer as suggesting that we are mindful of the opinion (*SA OC* 296:8) that women are exempt from *havdalah*, in which case the amens recited by a woman in response to the *berachos* subsequent to the *beracha* of *Borei Pri HaGafen* would constitute a *hefsek* (interruption) between that blessing and the drinking of the wine, and hence she should not drink.<sup>9</sup> Rav Frank is not fully

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<sup>6</sup> See *Sefer HaShla* end of *Mesechet Shabbat*. This is also cited in *Ta'amei HaMinbagim* (p. 188, par. 417) and in *Sefer Matamim* (p. 213, #200) in the name of *Divrei Tzadikim*, and in other later sources.

<sup>7</sup> This is one of the many opinions about what kind of tree the *eitz hadaat* was. Some of the other options offered by *Chazal* include the fig, *esrog*, wheat, and carob. See Ginzburg, *Legends of the Jews*, vol. V, p. 97, n. 70 for sources. That it was a grapevine is the opinion of Rabbi Meir in *Berachos* 40a and in *Bereishis Rabba* 15:8.

<sup>8</sup> Cited in *Mi' Yam HaHalacha* 3:68.

<sup>9</sup> See *Shmirat Shabbas K'Hilchasa* 2:61:24 who cites the ruling of Rav Shlomo Zalman Aurbach to the effect that a woman making her own *havdalah* should skip the *beracha* on fire [*borei m'orei ha'eish*] because it may constitute an unwarranted *hefsek*, interruption, between the *berachos* of *havdalah*. So too answering amen to a *beracha* said by a man may be a *hefsek* (ibid. n. 68). Many others disagree with this whole premise and treat this *beracha* as a *birchas ha'shvach* that women must [or may] recite (Rav

comfortable with this reasoning because in practice they do have to hear *havdalah* out of doubt, and a doubtful obligation is still an obligation and hence the amens are not a *hefsek*.<sup>10</sup>

Rav Menashe Klein (*Mishne Halachos* 8:223) accepts Rav T. P. Frank's rebuttal, and also offers two reasons of his own to reject the novel suggestion of Rav I. Z. Meltzer, including that they could simply make another *Borei Pri HaGafen* and drink, as many people do for *kiddush*, a practice he says is common.

According to *Sefer Matamim* (#201 in the section on Shabbat: pp. 127-8 in the 1891 edition; pp. 213-4 in the 5753 edition), no matter what opinions one holds regarding the level of a woman's obligation in *havdalah*, there will end up being some sort of "halachik" (not only kabbalistic or philosophic) problem in her drinking the wine. If she is biblically obligated and, as is often the case, did not *daven maariv*, then she cannot fulfill her obligation by hearing her husband, who fulfilled his biblical *havdalah* obligation with *maariv*, recite *havdalah*. She needs to remember to recite her own *havdalah* phrase, and therefore she should not drink so as not to give the impression that she thereby fulfilled her obligation. And if she is rabbinically obligated or not required at all to say it, she should not drink so as not to give the impression she is as obligated as men and

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Moshe Feinstein, *Iggeros Moshe* CM 2:47:2; Rav Moshe Shternbuch, *Tshuvot V'Hanhagot* 1:266; *Kaf HaChayim* OC 296:55; *Be'er Moshe* 4:28; *Tzitz Eliezer* 14:43; *Halichot Beisa* 15:37). A similar issue arises regarding women who recited the *shebechyanu beracha* at candle lighting on *yom tov* night answering amen to the *shebechyanu beracha* in *kiddush*. *Shmiras Shabbas k'Hilchasa* (44:4) advises women not to answer. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (*Iggeros Moshe* OC 4:101:1) disagrees and rules that they may answer amen. Similarly, a concern about *hefsek* prompted Rabbi Meir Bransdorfer to rule (*Kol Hatorah* 69 [Nissan 5770]: 47) that a person making *havdalah* a second time because the first time his wine was vinegar should drink some of the wine immediately after the *hagafen* before the other *berachos*.

<sup>10</sup> See pp. 196-197 of Rabbi Simcha Bunim Cohen, *The Radiance of Shabbas* (ArtScroll, 1986), who wants to base the debate between Rav Isser Zalman Meltzer and Rav Tzvi Pesach Frank on the debate of whether when Yom Kippur falls on Shabbat one uses spices in *havdalah* (*Taz*) or doesn't for fear of a *hefsek* (*Bach*). For sources see: *SA* OC 624:3; *Taz* 624:2; *Mishna Berura* 624:5. I thank Rabbi Myron Wakschlag for pointing out this source to me.

lead her husband to think he can fulfill his obligation by listening to her.<sup>11</sup>

Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld offers a more metaphysical reason for why women don't drink the *havdalah* wine.<sup>12</sup> He observes that *Tur* (299), in the name of the *Yerushalmi* (*Pesachim* 4:1), notes that women preserved the sanctity of Shabbat for a longer period than men and have a custom of not doing work until later on *motzei Shabbat*. Hence they refrained from drinking the *havdalah* wine.

There may be a practical difference between the reasons. Based on the Shla's reasoning it would seem that if *havdalah* were made over another beverage, a permissible option (*SA OC* 296:2), there would be no contraindication to women drinking it. Based on this, it might also be suggested that if a woman is making her own *havdalah*<sup>13</sup> she should use a *chamar medina*—a permissible beverage other than wine—for the *havdalah*. Rav Frank's and the other reasons would apply to any beverage used for *havdalah*. The language of *Magen Avraham* is simply that women don't drink from the *havdalah* cup; he does not distinguish among beverages.

Women not drinking *havdalah* wine has become such a prevalent custom that it may affect another halacha. There is a prohibition to destroy or waste *shmitta* produce, and this may include using it in a situation wherein fewer people will drink it. Because of this, Rav A. Y. HaKohen Kook (*Shabbat HaAretz, Kuntres Achron,*

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<sup>11</sup> A similar reason is offered by the *Likutei Chaver* and cited by Rav Yitzchak Weiss in *Rivevot Efrayim* 4:124:13 (p. 253).

<sup>12</sup> Found in *Morah D'arah Yisrael*, vol. 3, p. 145. Cited in *Shemirat HaGuf V'haNefesh*, n. 4, p. 391 and *Rivevot Ephraim OC* 4:97:56 (p. 202). I thank Rabbi Myron Wakschlag for pointing out this source.

<sup>13</sup> As noted above, there is a major debate whether women may make *havdalah*. See *Ramah* 296:8; *MB* 296:35. For a lengthy summary of the various opinions, see Rabbi Pinchas Meyers (chief rabbi of The Hague), *Nachalas Pinchas*, 1992, #28 (pp. 171–185). The issue arises, for example, if Tisha B'av is on Sunday and a woman needs to eat. Most authorities permit her in such a circumstance to make her own *havdalah* (*Shevet HaLevi* 8:129; *Shmiras Shabbas K'Hilchasah* 62:48; *Moadim U'Zmanim* 7:255). On women saying *borei me'orei ha'aish* see: *Biur Halacha* 296:8; *Kaf HaChayim* 296:55; *Yabia Omer* 4: *OC*: 23-24:9; *Iggeros Moshe CM* 2:47-2; *ibid. EH* 4:65; *Shmiras Shabbas K'Hilchasah* 61 n. 69, and 62 n. 98.

22 (5753, vol. 2, p. 774)) suggests that ideally one should not use *shmitta* wine for *havdalah* because women do not drink *havdalah* wine.

The *Aruch HaShulchan* (OC 296:5) notes that not drinking is “a mere custom” that not all women observe. Furthermore, he emphasizes that this is not a reason for a woman to refrain from making *havdalah*. If she makes her own *havdalah* she should most certainly drink from it.<sup>14</sup> This sentiment is echoed by *Shevet Halevi* (OC 4:56). In addition, there is no question that women must drink all four cups of wine at the *seder* (*Pesachim* 108a-b; *SA OC* 472:14), even if it is Saturday night, in which case *havdalah* is also recited over the first of the four cups.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the widespread mention in later sources attesting to this custom, it appears to be a custom of relatively recent vintage, with the first written source being the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The lack of a written source does not preclude the possibility that a custom existed but is simply not attested to in writing. In this instance that does not appear to be the case, because contradictory evidence ex-

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<sup>14</sup> See also *Mishnah Berura* 296:35 and *Shmiras Shabbat K’Hilchasa* II: 60:38 who concur.

<sup>15</sup> See Rav Tzvi Cohen, *Erev Pesach She’chal B’Shabbat*, 5741 and 5754, pp. 172–174 [22:27]. In fn. 35 he notes: “[Even though women normally do not drink *havdalah* wine] this cup, since it is also *kiddush*, not only *havdalah*, maybe there is no concern [about her drinking it]; this seems obvious and I have not seen anyone who questions it.” He does NOT use in his argument that women are equally obligated to drink the four cups, but rather that the cup was also used for *kiddush*. This would imply that he would also “permit” women to drink the cup from *kiddush/havdalah* when another *yom tov* is on Saturday night. This is the opinion of Rav Ovadia Yosef and Rav Sraya Duvlitsky. See *Yalkut Yosef* vol. 4, *Hilchos Shabbat* I, p. 458, note 15. See also *Shu”t Siach Yitzchak* OC 172 and the opinion of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld found in the introduction to *Shu”t Mishna Scir* (and found in *Morah D’arah Yisrael*, vol. 3, p. 145) that women may drink from *havdalah* wine when *yom tov kiddush* is also recited over it, and must when it is the first cup of the four cups at the *seder*. So too *Rivevot Ephraim* OC 4:97:19 (p. 195). Regarding a *bentching* cup that was used for *havdalah*, see *Halichos Baisah*, note 92 to 15:36 and *Shmiras Shabbas K’Hilchasa* vol. 2, 59(62) that for sure the wife may drink it because it is a mitzvah for the family to partake of the *kos shel beracha*.



ists. Rav Amram Gaon (p. 117) and *Machzor Vitry* (p. 116) both suggest that the family should all drink the *havdalah* wine. The Tur (OC 299) records that the custom was for the person reciting *havdalah* to drink and then to give it to family members, and he makes no distinction between men and women, boys and girls. He then cites Rav Saadya Gaon (p. 128) as saying that one is not required to give it to others to drink, but there is no indication of any objection if they want to drink. Clearly, the custom in the 9<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries was for all to drink the *havdalah* wine. There is at least one explicit record of giving the *havdalah* wine to a woman. *Leket Yosher*<sup>16</sup> (a compendium of the customs of R. Israel Isserlein, author of *Trumot HaDeshen*, by his student Rav Yosef ben Moshe, 1423–ca.1490; section 1: OC: p. 57: item 3) notes that his teacher had the custom to give the *havdalah* wine to his wife and then to all his family members.

This all said, I have been unable to find any source that postulates hairy consequences as a result of a woman drinking the *havdalah* wine. Any such source would have to be late because, as shown, the entire custom is relatively recent.

### Women and Wine in General

There is no general aversion to women sharing of wine from rituals. The halacha is that the husband should give his wife some wine to drink from the *kos shel beracha* used for *bentching* (*Berachos* 51b; SA OC 183:4).<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, one of the reasons suggested for why women may not be obligated in *zimmun* is because benching with wine is preferred and it is not proper for women to *bentch* with wine (*Sha'ar HaTziyun* 199:6). Because drinking the *kos shel beracha* is considered propitious for a blessing (MB 183:19), the guests should likewise be given to drink, or if a guest leads the *bentching* he should give the host to drink. Similarly, there is no custom for women not to drink from the *kiddush* wine, but rather everyone,

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<sup>16</sup> On this work see Y. Dinari, *Chachmei Ashkenaz B'Shilbei Yemei HaBeinayim*, 5744, pp. 297–302.

<sup>17</sup> On when *bentching* should be said over wine, see Ari Z Zivotofsky, “Legal-ease: What’s the Truth About ... ‘*Birkat Hamazon* over Wine?’”, *Jewish Action*, Winter 5761/2000 (vol. 61, no. 2), pp. 62-63.

with no distinction made between men and women, drinks from it (SA 271:14). Under the *chuppah* and for the following week the wedding blessings are recited over wine and the bride drinks of it just like the groom (*Aruch HaShulchan EH 62:8*).

Unrelated to *kos shel beracha* there is a discussion in *Kesuvos* 65a regarding mixing women and wine. The general feeling is that beyond one drink, the two do not mix, although, contra the Surgeon General's warning, wine is considered healthy for a nursing woman and therefore Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi requires a husband to provide his nursing wife with additional wine (*Kesuvos* 49a). It is because they don't mix that, when three women make a *zimmun*, they do not *bentch* over wine as men do.<sup>18</sup> *Pnei Yehoshua* (*Kesuvos* 65a) says that it is on the basis of this gemara that women do not usually say *kiddush* Shabbat morning over wine. So too the inappropriateness of women drinking wine has led some authorities to exempt them from the obligation of drinking wine on Purim (*Rivevot Efrayim* vol. 1, 181) and on *yom tov* (*Bnei Binyamin on Rambam, Hilchos Yom Tov* 6:17).

### The *Havdalah* Wine Superstition

From the sources cited until now, it seems that the behavior contained within the legend, not drinking from the *havdalah* wine, is well documented within the last several hundred years, while the supposed consequence is nowhere to be found. But such a widespread idea most likely developed from somewhere. Its source may simply be that an exaggerated warning was issued for women to stay away from this male mitzvah, with the price for encroaching being some sort of diminution in their femininity, i.e., it would result in a sign of masculinization of those women who tamper with gender roles. And an obvious, outward sign of masculinization would be either facial or chest hair.

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<sup>18</sup> On the propriety of women making a *zimmun* see Ari Z Zivotofsky and Naomi TS Zivotofsky, "What's Right with Women and *Zimmun*," *Judaism* Fall, 1993; 42:4 (168), 453-464, and Ari Z Zivotofsky, "Legal-ease: What's the Truth About ... women's *zimmun*?" *Jewish Action*, Fall 5760/1999 (vol. 60, no.1), p. 52.

The closest written source I have found is a cryptic remark in the “*hashmatot* section” of *Sefer Matamim* (Rav Yitzchak Lipiyatz, p. 242 in 5753 reprint, p. 144 in 1891 edition) where he explains that it is because women do not have beards that they are prohibited (!) from drinking the *havdalah* wine. He offers no explanation for this seemingly bizarre connection. But one could imagine that such a statement could easily lead others to conclude that if she did drink it, she would grow a beard. However, despite the inclusion of this statement in *Sefer Matamim* (originally published in 1891), it does not seem to have been a widespread idea, and I have been unable to find it recorded elsewhere. *Sefer Matamin* compares this with a similar explanation, when he directs one to the book *Avodat Yisrael* (by Yisrael Shabtai—the Koznitz Maggid) where a similarly strange statement is made about *seudas shlishis*. In *Avodas Yisrael* (section on *Sukkos*: p. 275 in the 5768 reprint; 64b in 5610 edition) it is stated that based on a statement of the Ari’zal we learn that because women do not have beards (*dikna*) they are exempt from *seudah shlishis*, the third Shabbat meal, which the Arizal termed *seudasa d’dikna*.<sup>19</sup> This seems particularly strange because in normative halacha women are as obligated as men in the third Shabbat meal (*Shulchan Aruch*, OC 291:6; *Aruch HaShulchan* OC 291:4).<sup>20</sup>

In general, Chazal treated body hair on women as unwanted. They interpreted (*Sanhedrin* 21a) biblical praise (Ezekiel 16:14) of the beauty of Jewish women to refer to their lack of underarm and pubic hair. It was only later, according to Rashi, when they acted immodestly that they were punished and grew hair in those areas.

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<sup>19</sup> This literally means the meal of the beard. The Ari’zal composed a *zemer* to be sung at each of the three Shabbat meals, *Askina Se’udasa*. In it he describes the third meal as *seudasa d’ze’air anpin*, the meal of the short face. In that context the term *seudasa d’dikna* means the meal of the beard of the short face.

<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Y.B. Goldberger (*Avnei Chefetz*, vol. 3, no. 9) discusses the obligation of women in *shalosh seudos*. He states that they are obligated and notes that today’s educated women are indeed more careful about it than in the past. However, in order to justify the practice of those who were not careful, particularly Chassidim, he says that they follow the Ari’zal and thus do not treat it as obligatory on women. I thank Prof. Marc Shapiro for pointing out this source.

Subsequent to that, the practice was for Jewish women to remove that hair (*Rashi, Gittin 6b, s.v. ne'ima*). With these sources in mind one can see that a folklorist tradition could arise in which the “punishment” for participating in the male *havdalah* rite would be unwanted hair. But this still does not explain the specific connection to drinking the wine.

For a connection between *havdalah* wine and unwanted hair it may be possible to find a source in the gemara in *Moed Kattan* (9b) that discusses methods of removal of unwanted hair. The mishna (ibid. 8b) enumerates things that may and may not be done on *chol hamoed*. Among them, it states that women may apply makeup, but Rabbi Yehuda prohibited them from applying lime as a depilatory. The Gemara discusses the particulars of Rabbi Yehuda’s prohibition, but seems particularly concerned with girls and women not having unwanted hair. Uncomfortable and unseemly lime that will be removed on *chol hamoed* may therefore be applied on *chol hamoed* because of the joy it brings when it is removed and the hair is gone, leaving behind smooth skin. *Rashi (Moed Kattan 9b s.v. v’lo higuyu)* suggests that specifically girls under age 12 were anxious to remove pubic hair and used the methods described in the text of the Gemara, implying that these methods were used only by pre-pubescent girls for pubic hair. However, the continuation of the Gemara indicates that the described methods were used to remove hair from the entire female body and that the results made a girl more beautiful. In concluding the discussion, the Gemara asserts that **drinking beer causes unwanted hair on females**, and it was girls who drank beer who required the use of the described methods to remove the unwanted hair.

In Eastern Europe wine was a rarity. The *Aruch HaShulchan* (OC 182:1) explains that despite the halachik obligation, they did not *bentch* over wine simply because it was very expensive.<sup>21</sup> According to all opinions *chamar medina* may be used for *havdalah* (*MB 271:56*). Because of the difficulty in obtaining wine, it is possible that in Eastern Europe beer was the beverage commonly used

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<sup>21</sup> He does say that other beverages were also expensive and most of what they drank was water. But it is unquestionable that wine was exceptionally difficult to procure in Eastern Europe.

for *havdalah* and hence women were advised not to drink it because beer, not the *havdalah* beverage, causes unwanted hair. This *bubba meise* that was originally based on the specific beverage<sup>22</sup> was eventually ascribed to the ceremony, and the legend evolved that women drinking the *havdalah* wine grow unwanted hair.<sup>23</sup>

In other words the historical development may have evolved in a manner something like this: Woman in general did not take an active part in *havdalah*. For much of history, Jews lived in regions in which wine was readily available and thus used in *havdalah*. The explanation for why women seemed not to drink of the *havdalah* wine was linked to wine. In the last several hundred years when a sizable number of Jews lived in regions where wine was unavailable, beer or alternative beverages were used. An alternative explanation for women not drinking developed that related to the beverage they used, beer, but in time the link to the beverage was forgotten and the hairy consequences were ascribed to the ritual, not the drink.

*Tur* (OC 296; citing *Pesachim* 113a) quotes Rabbi Yochanan as listing three people who inherit *olam habab*. They are: one who lives in the Land of Israel, one who raises his children to study Torah, and a person who on Shabbat night recites *havdalah* over wine. May we have the merit of all three. ❧

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<sup>22</sup> I am not sure how, but this fable may also somehow be linked to the *Gemara* in *Kesuvos* 60b that if a pregnant woman drinks beer her children will have the unwanted characteristic of being overly dark.

<sup>23</sup> There are similar notions among other Jewish cultures. Among Yemenites the belief is that a woman who drinks the *havdalah* wine will be “cursed” by having only daughters. In Djerba they believed that a girl who drinks the *havdalah* wine will have trouble getting married.