

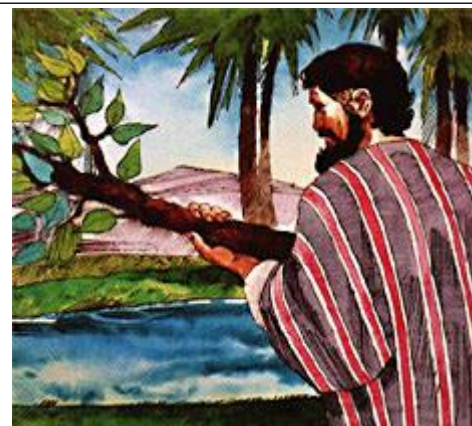
Pshats for Shots

A project of JewishDrinking.com

Bitter Waters Sweetened by Wood

There are bitter beverages in this world and they are not always pleasant to drink. While we are familiar with beer as perhaps the most recognizable bitter beverage, it doesn't have to be bitter. The idea behind beer is that the fermented grains, themselves, are fairly sweet, so hops or other bittering ingredients are added to balance the brew.

In this week's parashah, a different phenomenon happens: the children of Israelite encounter water which is too bitter for their consumption (Ex. 15.23-25): "וַיָּבֹאוּ מִן־מִדְבַּר סִינַי וַיָּבֹאוּ אֶל־מַרְיָה וְלֹא־יָקְלוּ לְשִׁתּוֹת מַיִם מִמַּרְיָה כִּי מְרִים הֵם עֲלֵיכֶן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ מְרִי וַיִּלְנוּ הָעָם עַל־מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר מִה־נִּשְׁתָּה וַיִּצְעַק אֶל־ה' וַיֹּרְהוּ ה' עֵץ וַיִּשְׁלַךְ אֶל־הַמַּיִם וַיִּמְתְּקוּ הַמַּיִם שָׁם שָׁם לֹא חָק וּמִשְׁפָּט וְשָׁם נִסָּהוּ They came to Marah, but they could not drink the water of Marah because it was bitter; that is why it was named Marah. And the people grumbled against Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" So he cried out to the LORD, and the LORD showed him a piece of wood; he threw it into the water and the water became sweet. There He made for them a fixed rule, and there He put them to the test."



Here, we see that some sort of wood, instead of providing more bitterness to this bitter water, actually decreases the bitterness(!).

Which wood out there does this? Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1167) plainly states that we don't know what this wood is: " זה העץ לא ידענו מה היה. רק דבר פלא היה We don't know what this wood was; it's simply an amazing phenomenon."

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Drinking on the Daf

For those keeping up with the Daf Yomi cycle, there are a few discussions of drinking this past week:

- Rabbi Eleazar said we learn from Eli's words to Hannah that one is drunk and prays is considered like an idolater (*Berakhot* 31b)
- A couple of different amoraim quote Rabbi Yohanan as stating that the men of the Great Assembly created blessings for Kiddush and Havdallah, then subsequently, they were to be said over a cup of wine, with an ensuing discussion on saying Havdallah in both prayer and over a cup of wine (*Berakhot* 33a)
- A discussion surrounding the blessing over wine and wondering whether it satiates or not, including a mention that Rava would drink wine all *erev Pessah* (*Berakhot* 35b)



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Rabbi Hezekiah ben Manoah (1250-1310) picks up on the irony of a sweetening wood: "אף על פי שזה היה ביד הקדוש ברוך הוא להמתיק בלא עץ דרכו לעשות נסים כמנהג העולם שמטילין דבר מתוק לתוך דבר Although this was in the power of the Holy One Blessed Be He to sweeten the water with this wood, His way was to perform miraculous actions in the typical operation of the world, that we normally place something sweet into something bitter."

So, yes, we typically place something sweet to make something less bitter, yet, here, this wood may have its own bitterness, yet it enables this water to become sweetened to the point of potability. And not only that, but for such a large enough body of water to give water to the Israelites!

Quite something!

New Podcast/Video Episode 🎧📺



Jay Rosen - Tu b'Shevat Cocktail and the Cocktail Scene in Israel

Tu b'Shevat cocktails and the contemporary cocktail scene in Israel, featuring Jay Rosen

Drinking Halakhah of the Week

With Tu b'Shevat coming up next week, I wanted to take a moment to consider the order of blessing with regard to wine and fruits.



In his comments to the order of blessings over fruits and which take precedent (ש"ע או"ח 211:4), Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1530-1572) comments "ודוקא שאוכל ענבים כמות שהן אבל אם עשה מהן יין שקובע ברכה לעצמו בורא פרי הגפן חשובה והיא קודמת לברך עליו תחלה אבל מעשה קדירה מחמשת מיני דגן היא חשובה יותר מברכת היין כל הנאמר סמוך לארץ קמא קודם למה חשובה יותר מברכת היין כל הנאמר סמוך לארץ בתרא לאחר ששוה לו בסמיכה לארץ This [order of precedents concerning fruits] is specifically when you're eating grapes, but if one makes wine out of them, it sets up an entirely separate blessing of 'the Creator of the fruit of the vine', which is important and one should proceed to bless upon it first. But, a cooked/baked food from one of the five grains is more important than the blessing of wine. Everything that is said close to the first mention of 'land' in Deuteronomy 8.8 precedes those words adjacent to what is said in the second mention of 'land' in the same verse, since they are equivalent in their proximity to the mention of 'land' in that verse."



"Because man does not live on bread alone" (Deut. 8.3)

JewishDrinking.com is a new project, begun in the fall of 2019 to serve as the #1 resource for texts, wisdom, and more on drinking in the Jewish tradition. With source sheets, weekly parashah sheets, weekly podcast/video episodes with guests, articles, and more, JewishDrinking.com seeks to shed light on this human activity. If you have comments, questions, suggestions, on either this parashah sheet and/or the website, please email Drew@JewishDrinking.com – ideas are welcome! לחיים!