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A Drunken Rebellion?

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When we read of Korah's rebellion at the outset of this week's Torah portion, a lot of our considerations about this challenge to Moshe concerns the motivations and reasons behind it. Throughout the book of Numbers, we read of a variety of leadership challenges for Moshe, while here is a direct challenge to his leadership. Of all the responses he could have provided, he begins with saying בִּקְרָה וַיֵּדַע ה' אֶת־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ "Come morning, The LORD will make known who is [God's] and who is holy by granting direct access; the one whom [God] has chosen will be granted access" (Num. 16:5).

This direct challenge setting-up a showdown sounds quite dramatic and will certainly put an emphatic end to any question on the matter. However, a question that often goes overlooked is why does Moshe start off by responding "בוקר" - "in the morning"? Why not just have their showdown right then and there?

An insightful midrash suggests that Korah and his followers may have gotten riled up while eating and drinking (*Midrash Tanchuma, Korach 5*):

מָה רָאָה לוֹמֵר, בִּקְרָה וַיֵּדַע?
אָמַר מֹשֶׁה, שְׂמָא מִתּוֹךְ רַב מֵאֲכָל וּמִשְׁתֵּה אִמְרוּ דְבַר זֶה.
לְכָר אָמַר, בִּקְרָה.

אָמַר, שְׂמָא בֵּין כֶּךָ וּבֵין כֶּךָ יַעֲשׂוּ תְשׁוּבָה. לְכָר נֶאֱמַר: בִּקְרָה וַיֵּדַע.
אָמַר לָהֶם: אִין לִי רְשׁוּת לִיכְנֵס עִבְשׁוּ, אַף עַל פִּי שְׂאִין לְפָנָיו לֹא אֲכִילָה וְלֹא שְׁתִּיָּה, אֲלֵא בְשִׁבְלִינוּ שְׂאֲכִלְנוּ וְשְׁתִּינוּ.

What reason did he have for saying, "In the morning He will make known?"

Moses said, "Perhaps they said this because they had been excessively eating and drinking."

He therefore said, "In the morning." Perhaps between now and then they will repent.

He said to them, "I have no authority to enter [the tabernacle] now. Even though there is no eating and no drinking, it is simply because of us [that we are forbidden to enter] as we have taken food and drink."

This midrash positions Moshe's suggestion for them to meet in the morning as they would have, through their eating and drinking together, got swept up in a mob mentality. While drinking is mentioned here, it's not done so as the main inspiration or catalyst for their rebellion. Further, this midrash also mentions that maybe Moshe didn't want them to enter

into bring offerings if they had been drinking.

While Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki (acronymally known as Rashi) (1040-1105) is known for his summarizing of midrashim in his commentary to the Torah, what he does with this midrash is interesting:

עַתָּה עֵת שְׂכָרוֹת הוּא לָנוּ וְלֹא נִכּוֹן
לְהִרְאוֹת לְפָנָיו
וְהוּא הִיָּה מִתְכַּוֵּן לְדַחוֹת שְׂמָא יַחְזִירוּ
בֵּיהֶם

"Now is a time of drunkenness and it is not appropriate to appear before Him."

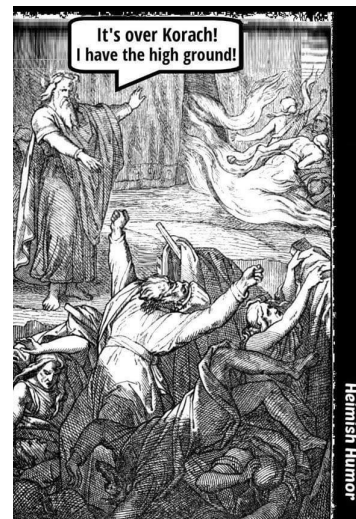
But his real intention in postponing the matter was that perhaps they might reconsider [their opposition]

Instead of directly quoting the midrash, not only doesn't mention the eating, he goes straight for it being a matter of them having gotten drunk off of their drinking. While in the midrash, it's just simply a matter of them drinking, whereas Rashi says they got drunk. It is not hard to imagine a bunch of guys sitting around drinking getting riled up and then pushing for a rebellion, especially since Hitler's Beer Hall Putsch was just a century ago, in 1923.

In Rashi's telling, Moshe saw hundreds of drunken leaders upset at him and his brother, so he did what any of us would do - urge for cooler heads to prevail and to sleep off the booze. But not only sleeping off one's drunken excitement, but also stepping away from being swept up in all of the political excitement being around over two hundred other guys in a mob mentality. Further, as Rashi mentions, bringing offerings to God while under the influence is not appropriate, as we read in Leviticus 10:8-11.

Another aspect of Rashi's commentary that is fascinating is that he doesn't write that Moshe said, "You guys are drunk", rather that "it is a time of drunkenness." Amidst his commentary on Rashi's commentary, *Sifsei Hachhamim*, Rabbi

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The Jewish Drinking Show

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* features Prof. Claudia Bergmann discussing drinking (or the lack thereof) for the World to come in Second Temple Literature. This is the final episode for a couple of months, while the show takes a summer break.

Drinking in the World to Come in Second Temple Literature



The Jewish Drinking Show is available on YouTube, as well as wherever you listen to podcasts



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Shabbethai ben Joseph Bass (1641–1718) explains
עת שכרות' רצה לומר שכבר הכל אכלו סעודתן, ויש לחוש שמא אחד שתה'
'רביעית יין, ולפיכך אין להראות לפניו, ולכך 'עת שכרות
ולא אמר 'משוכרים אתם', אלא שהזמן הוא זמן של שכרות, שדרך בני אדם
שאכלו ושתו להיות שכורים

'a time of drunkenness' means to say that all of them had eaten their meal and they were concerned that they may have drunk a quarter-log of wine (about a few ounces); therefore, it was not appropriate for them to appear before Him, thus, "a time of drunkenness." He didn't say, "You are drunkards", rather that the time was the time of drunkenness in which people eat and drink to get drunk.

In other words, whether or not any of them were actually drunk, even if they had a few ounces of wine to drink, they would have been unfit to bring an offering, thus Moshe said to sleep it off. Further, even if none of them had actually been drinking, it's still normally the time that people actually do get drunk, which is certainly a fascinating insight - perhaps even one that may resonate with readers of this publication.

Whatever the case may be, whether that they were a drunken mob or simply under a mob mentality having gotten riled up, potentially while having had food and beverages, or simply suggesting they let cooler heads prevail, as the midrash and Rashi suggest, Moshe seeks to calm the rebellion down for a sober showdown the next morning.

L'chaim!

Fee Brothers Bitters Now Kosher-Certified



For kosher-keeping cocktail consumers, there is wonderful news for a bunch of products that are now kosher-certified. These products are not new, just newly-certified.

While almost all of Fee Brothers' products, including their bitters have been under kosher supervision for over a year now, they had been waiting to print up new labels identifying these products as such. While consumers should check with OK Kosher, the certifying agency, as to which products are kosher, Fee Brothers only began working on printing new labels this year, as their CEO, Jonathan Spacher wrote in an email, "we're still working through stock of the non-stamped/non-printed products. When we have new labels printed, all Kosher products have



Rabbi Drew with Fee Brothers CEO Jonathan Spacher in June 2022

the Circle-K printed on them and it has been this way since February of this year." Spacher also wrote that, "All other products (syrops, mixes, botanical waters, Fee Foam) are printed with the Circle-K, but our bitters line is 80% of our sales."

For kosher-keeping cocktail consumers, this is wonderful news! For more on this story, see JewishDrinking.com/FeeBrothersKosher

If you are, or know of someone, who struggles with alcohol abuse, alcoholism, or other substance abuse, there are resources out there to help, which are available at JewishDrinking.com/AlcoholAbuse