

ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

פרשת דברים - Vol. 2, Iss. 19 - 21-22 July 2023 - ד' אב תשפ"ג

How About That Fruit?

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In Moses' retelling and contextualizing of the travels and travails of the Israelites at the outset of the book of Deuteronomy in this week's Torah portion, we read of an interesting abbreviation of the story of the scouts who returned with bountiful fruit (Numbers 13). In Moses' retelling, ויקחו בידם מפרי הארץ ויורדו אלינו, "They took some of the fruit of the land with them and brought it down to us. And they gave us this report: 'It is a good land that The LORD, our God, is giving to us'" (Deut 1:25). Rather than specifying which fruits or even the most significant fruit of them all, a bunch of grapes (that they had to use a carrying frame they were so plentiful), Moses characterizes them as simply fruit.

On this verse, Rabbi Shimon, a leading second-century sage commented, "א"ר שמעון: עלובים בני אדם שכך נטלו בידם, כאדם שנטל בידם Rabbi Shimon said: "Shameful are these men who took in their hand: like a man who would take in his hand an *assarius's* worth of figs or an *assarius's* worth of grapes, thus they took in their hands" (*Sifrei Devarim* 23:1). While an *assarius* does not mean much to you or me, it was the lowest valued coin regularly issued during the Roman Empire, weighing about 177 mg, so he is pointing out that



Moses' description of their handling of these fruits in a way that seemed to downgrade their worth.

It's also pretty shocking, since they came back bringing the bounty of the fruits of the land of pomegranates, figs, and massive bunches of grapes, yet Moses downplays it. What's particularly striking, though, is the juxtaposition of saying it is a good land, yet bringing back such small fruits. In Numbers 13, they had massive fruits and while Caleb and Yehoshua provided positive reporting, the other ten provided pessimistic reporting.

Indeed, as Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in the 19th century wrote on this verse: "*Über die Vortrefflichkeit des Landes waren sie ja alle einverstanden und hatten ja auch den Beweis in den mitgebrachten Früchten in Händen. Alles andere war ja nur der subjektive Eindruck, den die riesige Erscheinung der Bewohner auf die Kleinmütigen gemacht hatte.*" They all agreed about the excellence of the country and had the proof in their hands of the fruits they had brought with them. Everything else was only the subjective impression that the gigantic appearance of the residents had made on the faint-hearted."

The fruit, especially the grapes, impressed upon the people the massiveness of the challenge ahead of them. Perhaps, however, what Moses is doing is recasting this story to say to the people just as the fruits were not that crazily massive, nor are the inhabitants of the land - it was a ridiculous report by those ten scouts. Just as the fruits were smaller-sized, so, too, are the inhabitants of the land and the challenge they pose to the Israelites. L'chaim



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Oneg Shabbas is a project of Jewish Drinking, Inc., a 501(c)3 initiative to educate about drinking in Jewish wisdom, tradition, history, practice, and more in order to enrich people's lives. This publication is composed by, edited by, and published by Rabbi Drew Kaplan. If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, he can be reached at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

The Jewish Drinking Show Episodes for This Time of Year



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What To Drink During The Nine Days?

Now that the nine days have begun, I have begun to see questions popping up in online spaces asking about various alcoholic beverages to be consumed from Rosh Hodesh Av through the 8th day of the month of Av (The Nine Days). One thing that is clear is what Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) wrote in his *Set Table*, “ש נהגים שלא לאכול בשר ושלא לשתות יין בשבת זו ויש” There are those that are accustomed neither to eat meat nor drink wine during the week in which Av 9th occurs. And there are those that add from Rosh Hodesh [Av] until the Fast (Av 9th)” שו"ע או"ח (תקנ"א:י). However, what about non-wine beverages?

One thing to keep in mind is that Rabbi Moses Isserles (1530-1572) commented on Rabbi Karo's *Set Table*, “מותר לשתות כל” של דבש שקורים מע"ד It is permissible to drink any alcoholic beverage, even of honey, which they call 'mead'” (רמ"א לשו"ע תקנ"א:יא), so beer and mead are okay to drink during this period of time, but what about alcoholic beverages which include wine in them?

A key text that deals with this question is what Rabbi Hayyim Mordecai Margoliot (d. 1818) wrote in his book, *Response Gates*, commenting on Rabbi Karo's reporting of the custom:

Rabbi Isaac Zekel Etthausen (1687-1763) wrote in his book, *Hidden Light*, that he had been asked by someone who was a Torah-knowledgeable and God-fearing person, who had some sort of condition whereby beer-drinking would cause him pain: would he be permitted to drink wine or wine diluted with water whereby the strength of the wine would be nullified and all that would remain would be a little bit of the flavor, and not actual wine, itself – would it be permitted to drink that from Rosh Hodesh Av up until the fast?

כתב באור נעלם שנשאל מבעל תורה וירא ה' שיש לו איזה מיחוש שמזיק לו שתיית שכר ואין רשאי לשתות רק יין או יין מעורב עם מים באופן שנתבטל כח היין ואין בו אלא מעט מטעמו ולא ממשו אי רשאי לשתות כך מר"ח אב עד התענית

And Rabbi Etthausen wrote to permit drinking such a mixture, even if there were not even six parts of water in ratio against the wine, and a little bit of the wine flavor would still remain. Nevertheless, all that is mixed in a more than sufficient amount for mixing until it is not appropriate to bless “Blessed...is the Creator of the fruit of the vine” upon it is permitted to drink during these days. And whiskey is also permitted; even brandy made from wine lees, since it has departed from the category of wine, as one no longer makes the blessing of “Blessed...is the Creator of the fruit of the vine” upon it, but simply “Blessed...by Whose word everything came into existence”. See there.

So, according to Rabbi Etthausen, whom Rabbi Margoliot quotes, as long as something no longer requires the blessing בורא פרי הגפן, then it is fit to drink during this time, including even brandy made from grapes or wine lees. It would seem, also, that consuming cocktails containing vermouth would also be fit for consumption during this time. This may be due to what Rabbi Eliyahu Kramer (“Vilna Gaon”) (1720-1797) wrote on Rabbi Isserles' comment above, “משום ניסוך היין” that the reason for this prohibition is on account of the wine libations [being stopped at the time of the destruction of the Sanctification House, (which is what we are commemorating during this time period)]” (ביאור הגר"א לשו"ע או"ח:יא).

Thus, as long as it is not wine that is appropriate to be libated, then it is not within the parameters of what is forbidden. This idea about wine and meat being off-limits at this time gets further articulated by Rabbi Yehiel Mikhel ha-Levi Epstein (1829-1908), who wrote that this practice is לזכר הקרבנות to commemorate the stopping of the offerings and the libations on account of our sins" ערוך השלחון) and that “ואפילו חומץ של יין” (או"ח תקנ"א:כ"ג) and other beverages are permissible to drink, even wine vinegar" (ערוך השלחון או"ח תקנ"א:כ"ד). L'chaim to bringing back libations!

וכתב להתיר אף שאין במים ששה חלקים נגד היין ויש בו קצת טעם יין מכל מקום כל שנתערב יותר מכדי מזיגה עד שאין ראוי לברך עליו בפה"ג מותר לשתות באילו הימים וגם יין שרף מותר אף י"ש העשוי משמרי יין כיון שיצא מגדר יין עד שאין מברכין עליו בפה"ג רק שהנ"ב ע"ש

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