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What Was the Forbidden Fruit?

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

A common curiosity that arises reading this week's parashah is "What was the forbidden fruit that Adam and Eve ate?" While the tree of knowledge of good and evil existed in the Garden of Eden, there seems to be no continued existence of it beyond that place. However, that does not seem to stop inquiring minds to try to consider that the fruit of that tree exists in the world beyond the Garden of Eden. Indeed, throughout the ages, various people - not only Jews - sought to figure out which fruit it was.

Not An Apple

While we are commonly familiar with the idea (especially in artistic renderings) in the [Christian-dominated] West that the fruit was an apple, there seems to be no such textual basis for this assertion. Indeed, in Philip Getz' recent review article of Azzan Yadin-Israel's new book, *Temptation Transformed: The Story of How the Forbidden Fruit Became an Apple* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), he writes ("Fruit of the Fall", *Jewish Review of Books* (Fall 2023), 13):

In twelfth-century France, apples began showing up in Christian depictions of "the Fall of Man," everywhere from the Cathedral of Notre Dame to illuminated Bibles and psalm books. These red and gold apples supplanted the previous identification of grapes and figs as the forbidden fruit with which the serpent tempted Eve and Eve tempted Adam.

Ultimately, Getz shares with us the connection (ibid., 14):

The generic word for fruit in Old French, *pom*, derives from the Latin *pomum*, which had been the Latin word commonly used to translate the similarly generic Hebrew *peri*. But in the twelfth century *pom* began specifically to designate apples. French readers of the Latin then projected this new meaning of *pom* onto its linguistic ancestor *pomum*, thereby transforming the generic fruit into their vernacular *pom*: a tempting apple.



Not An Apple, So What Else?

So what textual clues do we have within our own tradition as to which fruit this may have been? Let's go to what the rabbis speculated. The classic text concerning rabbinic speculation as to this fruit's identity is one with not one, not two, but three opinions (*Sanhedrin* 70a-b (parallel text at *Berakhot* 40a)):

It was taught: Rabbi Meir says: "The tree from which Adam the first man ate was a grapevine, since nothing else brings wailing upon a person, except for wine."

Rabbi Yehudah says: "It was wheat, since an infant knows not how to call 'Mommy' or 'Daddy' until the infant tastes grain."

Rabbi Nehemiah says: "It was a fig, since the thing that they messed up with, they repaired it, as it is said, 'and they sewed a fig leaf' (Gen. 3.7)."

תניא רבי מאיר אומר אותו
אילן שאכל אדם הראשון
ממנו גפן היה שאין לך דבר
שמביא יללה לאדם אלא יין
רבי יהודה אומר חטה היה
שאינו התינוק יודע לקרוא
אבא ואימא עד שיטעום טעם
דגן
רבי נחמיה אומר תאנה היה
שבדבר שקלקלו בו נתקנו
שנאמר (בראשית ג, ז) ויתפרו
עלה תאנה

What is fascinating about each of these second century rabbinic possibilities is that they each furnish a reason for the fruit they suggested. However, only one of them offers a Biblical proof-text, when Rabbi Nehemiah suggested that the fruit they ate is directly connected with their remedy for their noticing their nakedness. I will admit to personally liking this suggestion, as the fig leaves were there, so we know that figs were there, whereas we have no identification of any further fruits in the garden. But what about the other suggestions?

Wheat?

Rabbi Yehudah's suggestion of wheat is clearly peculiar, yet clever. No one considers wheat to be a fruit and who calls wheat a tree? Moreover, wheat is not something that one typically picks up and eats, yet one can still detect a sense of cleverness with this suggestion, despite it being highly unlikely.

Considering Rabbi Meir's Grapevine Assertion

Finally, it's fascinating to consider Rabbi Meir's suggestion concerning grapes/wine, especially for readers of this publication. His assertion that wailing comes upon the world because of grapes/wine is certainly intriguing.

Does Rabbi Meir mean to say that wine could be something that would help reveal knowledge? In this sense, could he mean that one's mind can open and operate more expansively while drinking wine? As such, Rabbi Meir would be indicating that this wine would help uncover morality, reality, and other wisdom through its consumption. Indeed, think about times when you have gathered with others over drinks and consider how you have thought differently, leading to new insights.

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Another possibility for Rabbi Meir is that he means that wine-drinking could be discovering and learning something totally new, even if that ultimately brings upon crying over a sad new reality? Indeed, this perspective would describe that new insights and ideas are not always pleasant. As such, consider the image of someone crying over drinks - whether they are crying while drinking as they consider something sad in their life, or perhaps simply drinking to drown their sorrows.

A third possibility could be that sometimes when knowledge is discovered, it's not always the most exciting and sometimes it can actually be quite hard to hear.

Finally, a fourth approach is that taken by Rashi (1040-1105), who suggests that simply their consumption of the fruit caused death and wailing upon the world (רש"י על סנהדרין ע; ד"ה שאין לך דבר שמביא יללה על), which has less to do with the intellectual and moral insights brought on by consumption and more to do with the physical aspects of grapes/wine causing death.

Amongst these approaches, it is still a surprising statement that a grapevine would cause wailing, especially since it would still be on the tree and not fermented at all.

Other Rabbis Who Thought that Adam & Eve Drank Wine

Nevertheless, this idea that Adam and Eve drank wine in the Garden of Eden is not restricted to this text, as we also read of another second century sage suggesting such consumption (*Sanhedrin* 59b):

Rabbi Yehudah ben Tema would say: "Adam, the first man, would dine in the Garden of Eden, and the ministering angels would roast meat for him and strain wine for him. The snake glanced at him and saw his glory, and was jealous of him."	היה ר' יהודה בן תימא אומר אדם הראשון מיסב בן עדן היה והיו מלאכי השרת צולין לו בשר ומסננין לו יין הציץ בו נחש וראה בכבודו ונתקנא בו
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We see that this idea continues into the third century, as well (*Sanhedrin* 70a):

Rav Hisda said, "Rav Ukva said", - and some say that Mar Ukva said: "Rabbi Zakkai said: 'The Holy One, Blessed be He, said to Noah: "Noah, shouldn't you have learned from Adam the first man, whose banishment from the Garden of Eden was caused only by wine?'"	אמר רב חסדא אמר רב עוקבא ואמרי לה מר עוקבא אמר רבי זכאי אמר לו הקב"ה לנח נח לא היה לך ללמד מאדם הראשון שלא גרם לו אלא יין
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Considering Adam & Eve's Wine-Consumption

While we do not read that Adam and Eve ever drank wine or were exposed to it in the Torah, I wonder if these rabbis found it absolutely impossible that they did not drink wine. Perhaps it was simply inconceivable that humanity could go without wine. Why would humanity have - spoiler alert - waited for Noah to create wine in next week's Torah portion? How could humans have winelessly lived for centuries? I find this surprise in their minds to be the most fascinating aspect of this rabbinic consideration of Adam and Eve's consumption in the Garden of Eden: the rabbis can not fathom humanity to live without wine. Perhaps this is the biggest takeaway of this entire consideration of this matter: humanity was not meant to live without wine.

L'chaim 🍷

Toast to Israel at 75 Mini-Series Resumes on *The Jewish Drinking Show*

With Hamas' murderous attacks last Shabbat on *Shemini Atzeret* in Israel, as Jews all over the the world are saddened, shocked, and stunned, Israel is very much at the forefront of our minds. As we continue to pray, donate, and otherwise contribute and consider Israel and its security, *The Jewish Drinking Show* resumes the latter half of its "Toast to Israel at 75" mini-series in the coming three weeks.

The final three episodes of this mini-series focusses on production in Jerusalem:

- 17 October - Ephraim Greenblatt & Shmuel Naki: Creating a Brewery in Jerusalem (Hatch)
- 24 October - Shmuel Naki (& Ephraim Greenblatt): Creative Brewing in Israel (Schmulz)
- 31 October - Bennett Kaplan: Jerusalem's Distillery (Thinkers)

For information on this mini-series, you can visit JewishDrinking.com/IsraelToast75



A Toast to Israel at 75

