

ONEG SHABBAS

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Considering Hospitality When Drinking – Why Didn't Lavan Provide Beverages?

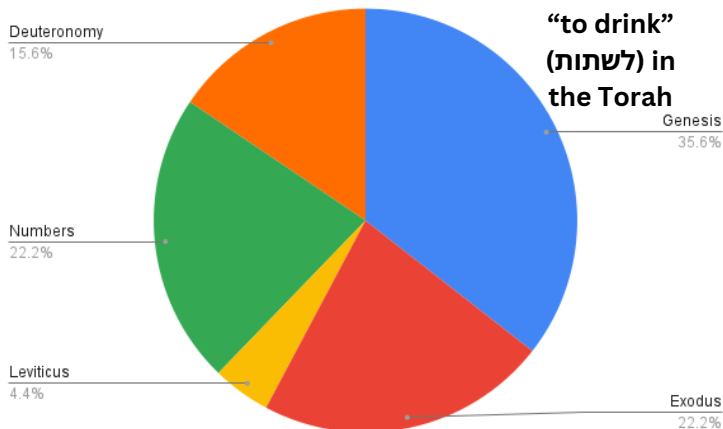
Rabbi Drew Kaplan

A Bonanza of Drinking...Water

In this week's Torah portion, we see a lot of drinking, all of which occurs in chapter 24, most of which appears in two separate sections: the first chunk is verses 11-27 when Avraham's servant encounters Rebecca by the well and she provides him water for both him and his camels, then we later read of Avraham's servant recounting the story to Lavan in verses 34-48. Within these two chunks of verses, we see the phrases drinking (שתייה) and giving drink (השקאה) eight times each, so there is a lot of drinking, even if it's of the non-alcoholic variety. Yet, strikingly, there is a moment when we would expect drinking to appear, yet it is conspicuously absent.

Preponderance of Appearances

To gain an appreciation of just how abundant the language of drinking and to provide drink within our parashah is, we need to understand that more than one-third of all appearances of the verb "to drink" (לשתות) in the Torah appear in the book of Genesis, with most of those appearing in chapter 24, as we see below:



Even the verb "to provide drink" (להשקות) mostly appears in the Torah in the book of Genesis, with nearly half of these appearances in chapter 24. Thus, even a cursory read of this chapter and parashah reveals a lot of the language of drinking.

Breakdown of Verbs for Drinking

In order to better understand these verbs, a helpful breakdown was provided last year by Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein, wherein he wrote ("*Chayei Sarah: Take A Drink*", *The Jewish Press* (16 November 2022):

In some cases, it uses cognates of *lishtot*, whether to denote the servant himself drinking (Genesis 24:14, 24:18, 24:44, 24:46) or his camels drinking (24:19, 24:22). In other cases, it uses cognates of *lehashkot*, again whether to denote the servant himself drinking (24:18, 24:19, 24:43, 24:45) or his camels drinking (24:14, 24:46). Finally, in one instance, the servant himself uses the word *hagmi'ini* ("allow me to drink") (24:17).

What, if anything, are the differences between these terms?

Inflections of the infinitive verb *lehashkot* appear over 60 times in the Bible, and not only in reference to humans and animals

drinking, but also to the watering of the land. Moreover, *lehashkot* does not actually refer to the act of drinking itself, but to the act

of providing water for another to drink. In contrast, inflections of the infinitive verb *lishtot* appear over 220 times in the Bible, referring exclusively to humans and animals drinking. Moreover, *lishtot* always refers to the act of drinking, not the act of providing another with something to drink.

The verb *lehashkot* cognates with the noun *mashkeh* ("beverage," sometimes with the implication of an alcoholic drink).

Now that we have a better appreciation of just how much of the language of drinking appears in our parashah, and the distinction amongst them, there is a moment that we would expect to read of drinking.

Drinking Missing?

At the outset of the meal in which Lavan hosts Avraham's servant, we read of them sitting down to eat (24:33), but where is the hospitality to offer drinks? In a chapter that is chock-full of drinking references, it is peculiar to read of them only sitting down to eat, yet not

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If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, he can be reached at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

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drinking. It is not as if there is a stunningly abrupt inability to express drinking. Why would they not be drinking?

Is it really a lack of expression? What if the story accurately depicts this interaction and Lavan did not offer drink to Avraham's servant? While we have seen beverages previously offered to guests (Gen. 18:8 & 14:18), was Lavan being stingy with serving wine and/or water to his guest?

Finally Drinking

While drinking does ultimately occur (Gen. 24:54), why only now do they drink? One possibility was simply that they now drank, on account of celebrating Rebecca's betrothal, as Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (1816-1893) suggested (העמק דבר על בראשית כ"ד:נ"ד). Indeed, this may have marked the successful conclusion of this negotiation. However, could there be yet another possibility?



Whether or not Lavan was being stingy or otherwise not fully hospitable to Avraham's servant, it could also be that Avraham's servant's recounting of Rebecca's hospitality in providing both him

and his camels water to drink made Lavan reconsider providing drink to his guest.

Whether it appealed to his sense of hospitality in realizing that a



guest travelling through a desert might be thirsty or simply that, after hearing about all that water-drinking, he, himself, got thirsty and decided to share drinks with his guest, either way, Lavan finally drinks with Avraham's servant.

Conclusion

While drinking certainly happens, the act of hospitality through offering beverages is very helpful and often appreciated. Perhaps a lesson to draw out from this story is that, even if one forgets or otherwise doesn't serve beverages to one's guests, maybe a little reminder can help us all in our own hospitality.

לחיים

“Sip for Solidarity”: Considering Israeli Wines

In these trying times, amidst the topsy-turviness that we are dealing with in the diaspora, our brethren are certainly dealing with a whole host of challenges. Amongst these challenges are in the wine industry. As such, one thing we can do is “sip for solidarity” by buying Israeli wines. This will not only help Israeli wineries, which are struggling, but also, through the end of the year, the Israeli Wine Producers Association will donate 10% of every case shipped through the end of 2023 to Israeli relief efforts. For more information on this: JewishDrinking.com/SipForSolidarity2023

Man Seders Featured on The Jewish Drinking Show

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* features Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Sinensky, as we discuss Man Seders, a relatively recent phenomenon. Man Seders are a pre-Passover activity wherein men get together over meat and alcohol to discuss elevating their Seders. A curiously recent event in recent decades, Man Seders have elicited some curious treatments in the past decade. This episode is available at JewishDrinking.com/ManSeders, as well as on YouTube and podcast platforms.



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Man Seders

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