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Why Did Yaakov Bring Wine to His Father?

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Amidst the scene in which we read of Ya'akov simulating his brother in order to trick his father to earn his blessing (Gen. 27:1-29), we read of his father requesting food, with him providing it (Gen. 27:25):

And he said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game so that I may give you my innermost blessing." So he served him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank.	וַיֹּאמֶר הַגֵּשָׁה לִי וְאֶכְלָה מִצֵּיד בְּנִי לְמַעַן תְּבָרְכֵנִי בְּנִפְשִׁי וַיִּגְשֵׁהוּ וַיֹּאכַל וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן וַיִּשְׂתֶּה
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On the face of it, Ya'akov's bringing wine to his father while eating is nothing strange and, perhaps, wine was a common beverage accompaniment to meals. One thing that slightly stands out is that Yitzhak requests food, which Yaakov brings him, but also brings him wine - why did he do this?

Wine & Blessing

One midrash on this matter does not answer this question, but does point out the rarity of the association of wine with blessing (מדרש תנחומא, תולדות ט"ז:ד):

When did Ya'akov get wine, since we do not read of his mother providing him wine [with which to provide his father]? Rather, "and she gave him delicacies" (Gen. 27:17). So who brought wine to Ya'akov? Michael brought him wine from the Garden of Eden. Our masters have said: "You only find wine resulting in a blessing in case of this story and with that story of Avraham, as it is said, 'And Malki Tzedek brought forth bread and wine' (Gen. 14:18), and also this story, as he drinks [the wine] and blesses him."	מהיכן היה לו יין, הרי מצאו שלא נתנה לו אמו יין, אלא ותתן את המטעמים וגו', ומי הביא לו יין, מיכאל הביאו לו יין מגן עדן אמרו רבותינו אין את מוצא יין של ברכה אלא זה, ושל אברהם, שנאמר ומלכי צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ויין וגו' (בראשית יד יח), ואף זה כיון ששתה ברכו
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There is a lot to unpack from this midrash! With the opening question, there is certainly a fascinating assumption that Ya'akov only provided his father with items that his mother gave him. And, if his mother did not furnish this wine, who would have provided him this wine? As astonishing as it is that this particular angel provided him this wine, it is seemingly even more fascinating that it originated out of the Garden of Eden(!).

While we previously discussed rabbinic midrashim on wine in the Garden of Eden in this publication (see *Bereshit*), this is seemingly unnecessary, as there is wine in the world and, perhaps, even already in their house, so why would an angel need to fetch it from the Garden of Eden? Does this midrash suspect that they lacked wine in their household?

In any event, another fascinating perspective emanating from this midrash is the notion that wine is only associated with blessing twice in the Torah, with this story being one of the two. This is certainly an interesting view, as we see wine used in some interesting ways in the book of Genesis, usually not in the context of blessings.

Wine Provided Because It Is a Meal

One possibility for Ya'akov providing wine to his father despite his father not specifically requesting wine is on account of wine typically accompanying meals. In this sense, Yitzhak would have no need to specify to his son to bring him wine, since he would understand that he would need a beverage to wash down his food.

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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

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Wine Not Typically Served at Meals?

One medieval Jewish commentator, however, thought otherwise. Rabbi David Kimḥi (1160–1235) wrote כי רוב מאכלם לא היה עם היין אלא “Because most of their eating was without wine, except for those verses that specifically indicate that there was a drinking-party” (רד”ק על בראשית כ”ז:כ”ה). This is a strikingly bold assertion on his part, as there are only five mentions of drinking-parties in the Torah, all of which take place in the book of Genesis.

I wonder if he did not expect drinking to take place so frequently throughout the Bible, perhaps as a reflection of what he saw in his day. Certainly, drinking takes place at drinking-parties in the Bible, however, why can drinking not take place outside of them? Moreover, we do read instances in the Bible in which they drank without the text specifying that it was called a drinking-party. As you can tell, I am not convinced by his assertion on this matter. However, what is fascinating from his commentary is that he is trying to point out that this was a special occasion that involved drinking wine.

Wine for Blessing in the Right Mindset

The reason that Yitzḥak would have wanted wine at this moment was, in the words of Rabbi Kimḥi, לשמח לבו שיברכהו בלב טוב “in order to gladden his heart so that he would bless him with a good mind” (רד”ק על בראשית כ”ז:כ”ה). This use of wine for getting in the right mindset would be that, even though Yitzḥak did not specify that he wanted to



drink wine, he definitely did want to drink the wine at this time. This is certainly understandable, as we find that people like to drink alcoholic beverages in order to get themselves relaxed or otherwise feeling in good spirits for certain occasions, such as watching sports, chatting with friends, or other such similar activities.

Wine to Confuse Him

Whereas Rabbi Kimḥi suggested that Yitzḥak wanted to drink wine for him wanting to drink wine, Rabbi Ḥezekiah ben Manoah (1250-1310) suggested that Ya’akov provided wine to his father to confuse him (חזקוני על בראשית כ”ז:כ”ה):

that wine would confuse peoples' minds a bit, so Yitzḥak would not be able to precisely determine if he was Esav or not.	שהיין מעררב קצת דעתו של אדם ולא ידקדק אם הוא עשו אם לא
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In this approach, it is not clear that Ya’akov even wanted the wine, but that he drank it since it was provided to him. Who knows? Maybe he happened to have been served the wine by his son and just went along with it.

This dulling of his thinking, however, is certainly a brilliant move on the part of Ya’akov. Despite whatever his father may have been thinking, this blurring of his discernment would help Ya’akov gain his father’s blessing. We know that serving alcohol to people can make it challenging for them to accurately ascertain and assess what is going on around them. In this approach to considering why he provided wine, Ya’akov is seeking to provide cover for his deception.

Wine as Blessing

Fascinatingly, amidst Yitzḥak blessing his son, he blesses him with an abundance of new grain and new wine (Gen. 27:28), which seems that, as an expression of his gratitude for being provided this food and wine, Yitzḥak wanted to bless this son of his with these provisions, and did not feel tricked by having been provided wine. Indeed, perhaps the providing of wine would serve to create a feedback loop: whereas he served his father wine, he would be, in turn, blessed to receive a lot of wine. It is an investment in blessing returns for his wine in the future.

Conclusion

Whether Ya’akov brought the wine out owing to its customary consumption along with meals, his father wanted to be in a special mindset at this occasion, he wanted to dull his father’s discernment, or just simply to invest in the chances for the blessing of more wine for the future, his bringing of the wine despite his father not having requested it, his father still drank it and provided him with a blessing. May we all be blessed with such wine. לחיים 🍷

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