

ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

פרשת ויצא - Vol. 3, Iss. 6 - 24-25 November 2023 - י"ב כסלו תשפ"ד

Why Did Lavan Throw a Drinking-Party Only for His First Daughter's Wedding?

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

When we read of Ya'akov's first wedding (Gen. 29:23), we read of a drinking-party taking place (Gen. 29:22), which seems festively appropriate. However, what is striking is that we do not read of any such celebration regarding his second wedding (Gen. 29:28). Why not?

Literary Assumption

The first possibility as to why there was no such mention of a drinking-party taking place for his second wedding is simply that we, as readers, should understand that despite the text mentioning anything about a drinking-party for Ya'akov's second wedding, it, nevertheless, took place, since that would have been assumed in a pattern.

Financial/Practical Reason

The second possibility as to why there was no mention of a drinking-party for Ya'akov's second wedding was that Lavan threw a drinking-party to celebrate welcoming Ya'akov into his family as his son-in-law. Thus, there would be no need to throw another drinking-party a week later, as he was already part of the family.

Publicizing for Social Reasons

A third possibility for throwing not only a drinking-party, but one in which Lavan brought a lot of people to celebrate, was to lock Ya'akov in socially to making it known that he was married to Leah and could not easily back out, as suggested by Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855) (ביאור יש"ר על התורה, בראשית כ"ט:כ"ב):

Lavan gathered...but there was no such mention of a drinking-party for Raḥel[’s wedding], since Lavan’s intention was publicizing it for the eyes of all of the people of the place, so that Ya’akov would not

ויאסף לבן אבל ברחל לא נזכר שעשה משתה, כי היתה כוונת לבן לעשות נישואי לאה בפומבי לעיני כל אנשי המקום, כדי שיעקב לא

consider divorcing his wife the following day when he would see that she was Leah, causing him to be embarrassed amongst all of the people of the city that had ate with him at his wedding. There was no need to create a ruse for this wedding, since he knew that Ya’akov loved her very much.

יתן אל לבו לגרש את אשתו למחרת בראותו שהיא לאה, ויתביישו מכל אנשי העיר שאכלו עמו בחתונתו, אבל ברחל לא היה צריך לתחבולה זאת, כי ידע שיעקב אוהב אותה מאד:

This form of socially locking Ya’akov in would ensure he would not just leave her.

Getting Ya’akov Drunk on His Wedding Night

A fourth possibility, however, is something that seems quite possible: Lavan only threw a drinking-party for Ya’akov’s first wedding and not his second wedding in order to get him drunk



so that he would be unable to carefully discern whom he was bedding on his wedding night. This was first suggested by Flavius Josephus (37-100), who wrote that, because it was dark and he was drunk, he was not able to tell that he was not bedding Raḥel (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1:301).

This argument that Lavan threw this drinking-party to get Ya’akov drunk in order to not be able to distinguish amongst these women is further articulated by the Tosafists in the 12th century (דעת זקנים על) (בראשית כ"ט:כ"ב):

Lavan was a swindler, and that is why he is always referred to by our sages as “Lavan the swindler.” He intended to make Ya’akov drunk off of wine in order to deceive him so that he could not tell the difference between Raḥel and Leah. You should know that, behold, by Raḥel, there is no such drinking-party.

לבן רמאי היה ועל כן נקרא לבן הרמאי ונתכוין לשכר את יעקב בין כדי לרמותו ולא יבחין בין רחל ללאה ותדע שהרי ברחל לא עשה משתה

{continued on next page}



{continued from previous page}

Rabbi Yitzhak Karo (1458-1535) further articulates this notion, yet differentiates Lavan's party from previous instances of hospitality (תולדות יצחק על התורה, בראשית כ"ט:כ"ב):

Lavan was unlike Avraham in that he gave them to eat (Gen 18:5-8), nor was he like Lot that he said, "he made them a drinking party and cooked unleavened bread and they ate" (Gen 19:3), rather, he made a drinking-party whose main item is wine, in order to get him drunk, so that he would not know if [the daughter he brought him] was Raḥel or Leah.	לא כאברהם שנתן להם לאכול ולא כלוט שאמר ויעש להם משתה ומצות אפה ויאכלו אלא ויעש משתה שקביעותו עשה על היין כדי לשכר אותו בעבור שלא ידע אם היא רחל או לאה
--	--

Rabbi Karo points out that this drinking-party was dissimilar to previous such drinking-parties, where food was featured in addition to the drinking to help soak up the alcohol, whereas this drinking-party was more about the wine and, thus, more easily able to get Ya'akov drunk.

Indeed, as described several decades ago, here is a more contemporary articulation (James Diamond, "The Deception of Jacob: A New Perspective on an Ancient Solution to the Problem", *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 34, Fasc. 2 (April 1984), 212):

Before leading his daughter to Jacob's bed, Lavan prepared a "feast" (mšth). Under the cover of night, Lavan introduced Leah to Jacob's bed and we hear of no reaction on Jacob's part until his astounding discovery the following morning: "And it came to pass that in the morning, Behold it was Leah" (Gen. xxix 25). As a result of the "feast", Jacob was lulled into a state of intoxication which lasted through the night and prevented him from clearly distinguishing his bed-mate. It was not until morning, when the effects of the feast had worn off, that Jacob learned who his conjugal partner was.



This language of realizing something upon waking up from a drunken experience in Genesis is that described by Rabbi Dr. Zev Farber ("How Is It Possible that Jacob Mistakes Leah for Rachel?", *TheTorah.com* (21 November 2017):

The story of Jacob and Leah may also be connected to the story of Noah and his youngest son (Gen 9:20-27). ... Both Jacob and Noah are described as only realizing or comprehending what happened to them in the morning, perhaps implying that it was not only the morning light but the morning's sobriety that allowed each to realize his mistake.

This is certainly fascinating. However, Rabbi Dr. Farber points out that, "This interpretation is certainly possible, but is absent in the text. In the stories of Noah and Lot, the text is very clear that the protagonist is drunk; no such statement is made about Jacob." Nevertheless, there is a lot that goes undescribed in Genesis and can be read in between the lines, it would seem.

Conclusion

Whether the drinking-party was simply a common practice or simply celebratory for Lavan to throw for his first wedding of his daughters, it was clearly a Biblical drinking story. Whether Ya'akov drank any, drank some, or got drunk, perhaps it may have been a way for Lavan to dull Ya'akov's skills at realizing who his bride was in the dark on his wedding night. Ultimately, Ya'akov still got tricked after a drinking-party. לחיים 🍷

“Sip for Solidarity”: Consider 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

Drink Israeli Wine

Support Israeli wineries today!

