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Yoseph Sending Provisions to His Father

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When one is saying farewell to someone, it can certainly be helpful to send food with them to accompany them on their way. While we see that in our own lives, it is also quite true as we read in the book of Genesis. We certainly see this as we read of Yoseph sending provisions with his brothers back to their father who really has missed out on all the action going on in Egypt and really the drama going on there, but, as he reveals himself, he thoughtfully sends back provisions with them, seemingly not only for them to take back to Egypt, but also for their travels (Gen. 45:21-23):

Yoseph gave them wagons as Pharaoh had commanded, and he supplied them with provisions for the journey. To each of them, moreover, he gave a change of clothing; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of clothing. And to his father he sent the following: ten he-asses laden with the best things of Egypt, and ten she-asses laden with grain, bread, and provisions for his father on the journey.

וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם יוֹסֵף עֲגָלוֹת
עַל־פִּי פַרְעֹה וַיִּתֵּן לָהֶם
צִדָּה לַדֶּרֶךְ: (כב) לְכֹלֵם
נִתְּן לְאִישׁ חֲלָפוֹת
שְׂמֹלֹת וְלִבְנֵימִן נִתְּן
שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת כֶּסֶף וְחֲמִשׁ
חֲלָפֹת שְׂמֹלֹת: (כג)
וּלְאֲבִיו שְׁלַח כְּזֹאת
עֶשְׂרֵה חֲמֹרִים נְשָׂאִים
מִטּוֹב מִצְרַיִם וְעֹשֶׂר
אֲתַנְתָּ נְשָׂאֵת בְּרֵךְ וְלָחֶם
וּמִזֶּן לְאֲבִיו לַדֶּרֶךְ

Talmudic Take on "Best of Egypt"

While it is incredibly understandable and reasonable that he would send food with them for the way, is that all he sent them? While the phrase "best of Egypt" might simply refer to the foods that are mentioned within these verses as being amongst the highest quality in Egypt, there is a talmudic rabbi who suggests that this includes wine (Megillah 16b):

What are "the good things of Egypt"?
מֵאֵי "מִטּוֹב מִצְרַיִם" ?
Rabbi Binyamin bar Yefet said: "Rabbi
אָמַר רַבִּי בִּנְיָמִין בַּר יַעֲקֹב אָמַר
Elazar said: 'He sent him wine, which
רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר: שִׁגַר לוֹ יַיִן,
the elderly find pleasing.'"
שְׂדַעַת זְקֵנִים נוֹחָה הֵימֵנו.



(Please note that the verb Rabbi Elazar uses is שיגר (or שגר), which is the term found in many manuscripts (see MS Vatican 134, MS Oxford Opp. Add. fol. 23 (366), MS Goettingen 3, MS NY- Columbia X 893 T 141, MS Munich 95). The only manuscript that witnesses שלח is MS Munich 140, along with the printed editions (Pesaro, Venice, & Vilna) (It seems to have gotten inserted here as שלח, which was used in the previous line and seems to have got accidentally copied here..))

(Another item to note is that all of the manuscripts witness simply יין (wine), as only the Vilna edition has יין [aged] wine) - which is clearly an addition that seems to have crept in for that printing.)

As to why he sent him wine, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (acronymically known as Rashi) comments רש"י על מגילה ט"ז ב, ד"ה שיגר (לו יין):



Since the elderly find it pleasing, לפי שדעת זקנים נוחה הימנו
this is the best thing of all for him. זה הדבר הטוב לו מן הכל

While this may be true that the elderly find wine pleasing, why would he be sending wine? While it may be true that it provides comfort to the aged, it does not seem to be something restricted to elderly people, as wine can provide comfort to quite a wide range of ages. Nevertheless, there is certainly something quite understandable with this gift to his father that it should be wine insofar as it would be something that brings comfort to him.

Rashi Describing the "Best of Egypt"

In his commentary to the verse in our Torah portion, Rashi mentions not only this rabbinic suggestion, but another midrashic suggestion, as well (בראשית מ"ה:כ"ג, ד"ה מטוב מצרים):

We find in the Talmud that he sent him מצינו בתלמוד
old wine which old people like very משלח לו יין ישן
much (Megillah 16b), and a narrative שדעת זקנים נוחה
midrash states that he sent him split הימנו, ומדרש אגדה
beans. (Genesis Rabbah 94:2). גריסין של פול

As we read Rashi's comment on this verse, two aspects stick out. The first of these is Rashi's mentioning both of these possibilities from the Talmud and the midrash. However, what is the significance of these beans? To understand what is going on, let's check out the midrash (בראשית רבה צ"ד:ב):

this is split beans, which are effective in זה גריס של פול
soothing the uneasiness of the soul שהוא על עיקת נפש

With this midrash explanation as to the split beans, the key words are providing soothing to the uneasiness of the soul, which is interesting, as it sounds as if Yoseph is aware, perhaps from his brothers, as to how difficult things have been going for their father and these may ease his situation, even though he, himself, hasn't been in contact with his father. Ultimately, it turns out that his father later on self-describes his life as having been difficult (Gen. 47:9).

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Rashi's Addition to the Talmudic Description of "Best of Egypt"

The other aspect of Rashi's commentary to this verse is the addition of one word to the Talmudic suggestion. Whereas Rabbi Elazar is quoted as suggesting that the Yoseph sent wine, Rashi describes it here as old wine (יין ישן). A clear advantage of old wine versus regular wine is that it certainly contains alcohol content and usually has a more complex character.

Rabbi Luria's Commentary on Rashi's Addition to the Talmudic Description of "Best of Egypt"

Quoting an earlier commentator, Rabbi Shabbethai ben Yoseph Bass (1641-1718) wrote (בראשית מ"ה:כ"ג; ד"ה יין ישן שדעת זקנים) (נוחה הימנו):

Rabbi Shlomo Luria (1510-1573) wrote:	כתב מהרש"ל מדלא
"Since it is not written in the Torah what	כתיב בקרא מהו הטוב
was the good thing that Yosef sent him,	ששלח לו שמע מינה
it implies that it was not something	הוא דבר שאינו חשוב
notable. So why did he send it to him?	ולמה שלח לו לפי
Because for Yaakov it was good.	שליעקב היה טוב לכן
Therefore, he comments that it was	פירש שהוא יין ישן שזה
aged wine, which is generally not so	אינו דבר חשוב כל כך
notable, but it was noteworthy to	וליעקב היה דבר חשוב
Yaakov because old people derive	לפי שדעת זקנים נוחה
pleasure from it."	ממנו וכו' עכ"ל

In Rabbi Luria's take on this episode, he opines that this suggestion of aged wine, despite it not being mentioned in our Torah portion, was generally not notable, but special to Yaakov, owing to his being old and seeking to derive pleasure from it. This is an interesting take on the suggestion of old wine being special or noteworthy personally to Yaakov, but not to the Torah. While I am not convinced of this take on Rashi's description, I do think there is something significant to this old wine.

A Further Consideration of "Significance" in Rashi's Addition to the Talmudic Description of "Best of Egypt"

Whereas sending wine, according to Rabbi Elazar, might be a nice or special gift to send, how does it represent the best of Egypt? In which way is wine the best? Perhaps this is why Rashi sees a clear need to articulate that this gift of wine was not simply wine, but specifically aged wine. In this respect, whether it was amongst the best of Egypt in that it was of a higher quality, owing to its aging, or that it may have received the aging from the Egyptian air, specifically. This is certainly something that would make it significant and amongst the best to be found in Egypt and why Rashi would have added this descriptor here.

Improving in Age Like Fine Wine

Another aspect that Rashi's addition of describing this wine as aged accomplishes is providing both a better articulation of how it is pleasurable. Some of this is achieved with a higher level of being pleased with the higher degree of complexity, a higher degree of calmness, and alcohol content in aged wine over non-aged wine. Maybe this achieves a sense of contentment for the elderly more so than the non-elderly....



While this suggestion of aged wine rather than simply wine achieves something for anyone who may drink it, perhaps there is another notion taking place. Perhaps, Rashi sought to provide something of a poetic nature to this gift that whereas Ya'akov is aged, so, too, is this wine. However, it's not simply saying that the wine is old as Yoseph's father is old, but when wine ages, it settles down, it matures, it improves, it develops more character and complexity, so it seems to be that that is something that Yoseph is also yearning and hoping for when he sees his father after not having seen him for over two decades: that he yearns to see that his father has matured, has developed, and has become refined with time. In this respect, it yields an aspiration that Yoseph really hopes to see his father having been developed after all this time.

Thus Rashi's addition of this description of this wine being aged may provide us with an insight that Rashi seeks to see this gift on Yoseph's behalf of hoping to see his father as having become refined, more complex, more settled, and calmer than when he last saw him over two decades before. Alternatively, perhaps this wine being aged may reflect Rashi's framing of Yoseph as experiencing Egypt as a calmer, less turbulent, and a more complex place to live than in the land up in which he grew amidst the challenges he had to face with his antagonistic brothers. In this respect, this aged wine can exemplify the best of Egypt.

Conclusion

As we read of the various provisions that Yoseph sends with his brothers, we also read of him sending items for his father, whom he hasn't seen in over two decades. As wine is an important beverage, for both enjoying and as a gift, why would he not have sent wine? Indeed, perhaps he sent wine to provide succor to his aged father. Whether he sent regular wine or aged wine, perhaps this aged wine was sent, as it is calmer, more complex, and more delicious.

L'chaim 🍷

The Jewish Drinking Show

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* features Dr. Rebekah Welton, as we discuss The Wayward and Rebellious Son (בן סורר ומורה), an interesting, enigmatic, and curious passage relating to raising children (Deut. 21:18-21). It also happens to be an interesting Jewish drinking text to explore. Dr. Welton is a lecturer in Hebrew Bible at the

University of Exeter in the UK. Her monograph, *He is a Glutton and a Drunkard: Deviant Consumption in the Hebrew Bible* (Brill, 2020), focuses on the use of food and drink in ancient Israel. She teaches a class on God, Food and Alcohol in Israelite Cultures for undergraduate students and continues to enjoy teaching and researching on food and alcohol in the Bible.



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