



ONEG SHABBAS



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Visualizing a Land Flowing with Milk and Honey

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Having previously described in Parashat Shemot how a land oozing of milk and honey is a special agricultural blessing that may require work and also connects with drinking, what might it look like?

Indeed, we get the second occurrence of this phrase in this week's Torah portion, as Moshe addresses the people (Ex. 13:3-5):

Remember this day, on which you went free from Egypt, the house of bondage, how The LORD freed you from it with a mighty hand: no leavened bread shall be eaten. You go free on this day, in the month of Abib. So, when The LORD has brought you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which was sworn to your fathers to be given you, a land flowing with milk and honey....	זָכוֹר אֶת־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר יִצְאֶתְכֶם מִמִּצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עֲבָדִים כִּי בְחִזְקָה יָד הוֹצִיאָה אֶתְכֶם מִן־עֵץ וְלֹא יֵאָכֵל חֶמֶץ הַיּוֹם אַתֶּם יֹצְאִים בְּחֹדֶשׁ הָאֲבִיב וְהָיְתָה כִּי־יָבִיֵאֵר ה' אֶל־אֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי וְהַחִתִּי וְהָאֱמֹרִי וְהַחִוִּי וְהַיְבוּסִי אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּע לְאֲבוֹתֶיךָ לֵתֵת לְךָ אֶרֶץ זָבֶת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ
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Within this context, this phrase is part of a promise and sets up this future scenario helping the Israelites envision what it will be like when they arrive and, hopefully, also have an agricultural bounty. Of course, Moshe continues to describe abstaining from leavened products (Ex. 13:5-10).

What Does This Look Like?

As Moshe verbally paints the picture for the Israelites of what to expect when they arrive to this land flowing/oozing of milk and honey, how does milk and/or honey ooze?

It turns out we are not the only people to be curious about this imagery, as there are a handful of visual descriptions in the Talmud about how they think this looks.



Goats & Fig Trees

A description that appears in both Talmuds is that of people tying their goats to fig trees, one version of which is the following (*yPeah* 7:3):

Rebbi Huna in the name of Rebbi Idi: "It happened that someone tied his goat to a fig tree; when he returned, he found honey and milk mixed."	רַבִּי חוּנָא בְּשֵׁם רַבִּי אִידִי מַעֲשֶׂה בְּאֶחָד שְׁקִשָּׁר עָז לְתַאֲיִנָּה וְבָא וּמָצָא דְבִשׁ וְחֶלֶב מְעוּרְבִין
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In this description, it is simply that the honey from the figs were seemingly oozing down onto whatever milk may have emerged from the goat. It is unclear whether this milk happened to have simply emerged from the goat without the goat necessarily trying to express the milk or if the goat was simply so full that it could not retain the milk within itself. A similar description is that which is found in the Babylonian Talmud (*Ketubot* 111b):

Rami bar Yehezkel visited B'nei B'rak and saw goats grazing beneath a fig tree with honey oozing from the figs and milk dripping from them (the goats), and they were mixing together with each other. He said, "This is 'flowing of milk and honey'!"	רַמִּי בַר יְחִזְקֵאל אִיקַלַּע לְבְנֵי בְרַק חֹזְנֵהוּ לַהֲנֵהוּ עֵזִי דְקָאֵכְלֵן תּוּתִי תַאֲיִנִי וְקִנְטִיף דּוּבֶשֶׁא מִתַּאֲיִנֵי וְחִלְבָא טִיִּיף מִנִּיִּיהוּ וּמִעֵרְבַּ בְּהַדִּי הַדִּי אִמַר הֵיִינוּ זְבֵת חֶלֶב וְדִבְשׁ
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In this story, it is not one goat tied to the fig tree, but rather goats simply grazing beneath the tree. Moreover, it is clear that the figs were oozing out their honey, while milk was dripping from the goats,

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yielding their mixing. It also seems from his exclamation that he had also struggled with considering what this phrase would actually look like until he saw this scene, especially since it is rare to see either of these liquids ever oozing on their own, let alone together.

Another curious aspect of both of these descriptions is that one could potentially consider either [date] honey oozing on its own and [goat] milk oozing on its own, yet both of these scenes depict these two liquids flowing/oozing in a mixed fashion.

A Few Fantastical Descriptions

Going beyond these simple descriptions, the Babylonian Talmud then shares not one, not two descriptions, but three separate images of their experiences (*Ketubot* 111b):

Rabbi Ya'akov ben Dostai said: "There are three mil from Lud to Ono. Once I rose early in the morning and I walked in ankle-deep honey oozing from fig trees."

Resh Lakish said: "I myself saw flowing milk and honey by Tzippori, and it was sixteen by sixteen mil."

Rabba bar bar Ḥanah said: "I myself saw flowing milk and honey throughout all of Israel, and it seemed to be from the city of Bei Mikhsei until the fortress of Tulbanki: Its length twenty-two parasangs and its width six parasangs."

א"ר יעקב בן דוסתאי
מלוד לאונו שלשה
מילין פעם אחת
קדמתי בנשף והלכתי
עד קרסולי בדבש של
תאינים
אמר ר"ל לדידי חזי לי
זבת חלב ודבש של
צפורי והוי שיתסר
מילין אשתסר מילין
אמר רבה בר בר חנה
לדידי חזי לי זבת חלב
ודבש של כל ארץ
ישראל והויא כמבי
מיכסי עד אקרא
דתולבנקי כ"ב פרסי
אורכא ופותיא שיתא
פרסי

(A mil, according to Wikipedia, "is a unit of distance on land, or linear measure, principally used by Jews during the Herodian dynasty to ascertain distances between cities and to mark the Sabbath limit, equivalent to about 3/4 of an English statute mile, or what was about four furlongs (four stadia)." According to Wikipedia, "The parasang is a historical Iranian unit of walking distance, the length of which varied according to terrain and speed of travel. The European equivalent is the league. In modern terms the distance is about 3 or 3 1/2 miles (4.8 or 5.6 km).")



I am not surprised to see Rabba bar bar Ḥanah, a third-century rabbi, here, since he is known for his tall tales (cf. *Bava Batra* 73a-74a), although I am somewhat surprised to see Resh Lakish, also a third-century rabbi, here describing such a massive flowing of milk and honey by Tzippori. While these two rabbis mention both honey and milk oozing, it is interesting that Rabbi Ya'akov ben Dostai only mentions the fig honey oozing and not the milk.

Conclusion

While it may have seemed simple to consider the phrase "a land flowing of milk and honey" meant to simply convey the notion of agricultural bounty, both in terms of the fruit yield, as well as the good grazing opportunities for goats, as described in parashat Shemot, how might it actually look? As we see from the Talmudic descriptions, perhaps we should consider what this would look like. Whether of a simple proximity of goats having milk expressed from them near the oozing of growing dates or figs, or whether it is of a fantastical visual of miles of date or fig honey literally flowing alongside goat milk throughout the land of Israel, the rabbis were keenly interested in painting a visual for us to consider how this might look. And, of course, since the juice of dates and figs may be used for beer-production, there was certainly a lot to be found.

L'chaim

The Jewish Drinking Show

Drinking During Mourning



EPIISODE #150

This week features the 150th episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, on the topic of drinking during mourning. While it seems strange to put these two different activities together, back in Talmudic times, it was expected that drinking would take place during shivah. However, during the Medieval era, that began to change. In this episode, the fifth "Drinks and Discussion"-style episode led by Rabbi Drew, took place during a Texts-and-Tasting event ("Mezcal & Mourning") that was graciously hosted by the Schwartzbergs in Cincinnati. This episode is available at JewishDrinking.com/MourningDrinking as well as on YouTube, as well as wherever you listen to podcasts.



2024 CRC List

The Chicago Rabbinical Council released its updating of their liquor list in the past week. According to the document, it is "updated regularly and should be considered accurate until December 31, 2024." This year's CRC kosher liquor list is slightly longer than the past two years' lists. The product category with the most pages is Beer, which seemed to get smaller this year. For more on this, check out JewishDrinking.com/CRCList2024



An archive of past issues is available at JewishDrinking.com/parashah-sheets

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