

# ONEG SHABBAS

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## The Blessing of a Lengthy Grape Harvest

Rabbi Drew Kaplan

Kicking-off our parashah is a blessing, which includes - yes - grapes [for wine] (Lev. 26:3-5):

If you follow My laws and faithfully observe My commandments, I will grant your rains in their season, so that the earth shall yield its produce and the trees of the field their fruit.	אם בְּחֻקֵי תִלְכוּ וְאֶת־מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעֵשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם: וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמִיכֶם בְּעֵתָם וְנָתַתִּי הָאֲרֶץ יְבוּלָה וְעֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרִי: וְהִשִּׁיג לָכֶם דְּבִשׁ אֶת־בְּצִיר וּבְצִיר יִשִּׁיג אֶת־זֵרַע וְאָכַלְתֶּם לֶחֶמְכֶם לְשִׁבְעַת יְשִׁבְתֶּם לְבִטָּח בְּאֲרָצְכֶם
Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and your vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your fill of bread and dwell securely in your land.	

This verb בָּצַר that describes harvesting grapes may not seem that familiar to us, as it does not appear that frequently, as it appeared for the first time in last week's Torah portion (Lev. 25:5 & 25:11), appears here, with one further appearance in the Torah being Deuteronomy 24:21. (It also appears eight times subsequently in the Bible: Judges 8:2 & 9:27; Isaiah 24:13 & 32:10; Jeremiah 6:9, 48:32, & 49:9; Ovadiah 5; and Mikah 7:1.)

### Midrashic Description

In considering this verse, a midrash describes it (ספרא, בחוקתי, פרק א' ז'): "And your threshing will reach the vintage" - that you will be engaged in threshing when the vintage (season) arrives.

"And your threshing will reach the vintage" - that you will be engaged in threshing when the vintage (season) arrives.	"והשיג לכם דיש את בציר" - שתהיו עוסקים בדיש עד שיגיע בציר;
"and the vintage will reach the sowing" - You will be engaged in harvesting the vintage when the sowing (season) arrives.	"ובציר ישיג את זרע" - שתהיו עוסקים בבציר עד שיגיע הזרע



### Rashi's Clearer Articulation of the Midrashic Description

While there is some ambiguity with this description, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known as Rashi) further explains it (רש"י) (על ויקרא כ"ו:ה; ד"ה והשיג לכם דיש את בציר):

This means that there will be plenty of threshing-work so that you will be busy with it till the vintage, and with the vintage you will be busy till the time of sowing.	שִׁיחָה הַדִּישׁ מְרַבָּה, וְאִתָּם עֲסוּקִים בּוֹ עַד הַבְּצִיר, וּבְבְצִיר תַּעֲסִקוּ עַד שְׁעַת הַזֵּרַע
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Rashi's addition of one word (מרבה), describing it as there being plenty means there will be a lot of both the grains-harvesting, as well as the grapes-harvesting, avoiding an ambiguity in the midrash, as Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel (1512-1609) describes Rashi's comment as providing a helpful direction (גור אריה על ויקרא כ"ו:ה; ד"ה שיהא הדיש מרובה):

Not that the grains would not cook and it would delay the harvesting until the grape harvest, which would be a curse and not a blessing.	לא שיהא התבואה אינה מבושלת ויתאחר [הדיש] עד (הדיש) הבציר, שזו קללה ולא ברכה
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### 19th Century Further Articulations

Moving beyond Rashi, a couple of 19th century rabbis provided more fully fleshed out articulations of this blessing, beginning with Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855), who wrote (ביאור יש"ר על התורה, ויקרא) (כ"ו:ה; ד"ה ובציר):

Corresponding to "and the tree of the field will give its fruit" (Lev. 26:4), so that the fruits of the tree will be so numerous that the grape harvest that is at the end of summer will approach and reach the seed time that is in winter.	נגד ועץ השדה יתן פריו, ויהיו פירות האילן כל כך מרובות, שהבציר שהוא בסוף הקיץ ישיג ויגיע עד זמן הזרע שהוא בחורף
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In other words, there will be harvesting of not only the grains, but also the tree fruits, as well.

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A more fully articulated description is provided by Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Mikhel Weisser (1809-1879) (popularly known as Malbim), who wrote (מלבי"ם על ויקרא, בחוקתי ו', ד"ה והשיג לכם דיש את בציר):

<p>The threshing of the harvest: you will be busy with the threshing of the grain that is harvested in Nisan (in the spring) until the time in the grape-harvesting of the vineyard, which is at the end of summer from the abundance of grain and the blessing. And the grape harvest will be extended until seed time. Even so, you will not need to increase the grain because you will eat to your fill and the blessing will be in your belly.</p>	<p>דשית התבואה הנקצרת בניסן תהיי עסוקים בה עד זמן בצורת הכרם שהוא בסוף הקיץ מרוב התבואה והברכה. וכן בציר הענבים יתארך עד זמן הזרע. ובכל זאת לא תצטרכו לריבוי התבואה כי תאכלו לשבע וישרה הברכה במיעים</p>
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### Conclusion

As we read of these descriptions, it results in a seemingly continuous cycle, beginning with a bountiful harvest of grains in the spring that results in a multi-month grain-threshing cycle that takes us all the way to the grapes-harvesting in the late summer that is so bountiful that processing all of these grapes into wine takes us into the seed-planting for the grains in the winter. The bottom line of this blessing is that there will be a lot of food to eat and, of course, a lot of wine to drink.

L'chaim 

## The Custom of Drinking Beer on Shavuot

With Shavuot only a week and a half away, it is now around the corner.



### Beer on Shavuot

With Shavuot only a week and a half away, it is now around the corner. As we prepare to celebrate this holiday, one aspect you may consider is that of drinking beer. Beer?

Yes, beer. Years ago, Rabbi Yonah Bookstein composed an essay, "Why I Drink Beer On Shavuot" in the *Jewish Journal* (subsequently re-posted on *HuffPost*), in which he writes:

While conducting some research on Shavuot a few years back, I came across an important footnote in the *Netei Gavriel*, an encyclopedic series of books on Jewish laws and customs. The *Netei Gavriel*, amid discussions of customs and practices around Shavuot — eating dairy food, decorating the shul with plants, flowers and grass — mentions the custom of having a keg of beer at synagogue for Shavuot. Yes, a keg of beer.

Later in the essay, he writes:

In the middle ages, a tradition arose in Eastern Europe, based on this Rashi, to have a barrel of beer in the synagogue, when Jews stay up all night and study until dawn to remember the giving of the Torah.

Someone recently asked me last year about these sources, so I looked into it, yielding that Rabbi Gavriel Zinner wrote (נטעי גבריאל יג:ו): In his footnote to that line, he writes:

<p>There are some who are accustomed to drink beer on the night of Shavuot</p>	<p>ש נוהגין לשתות שכר בליל שבועות</p>
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In describing the words towards the outset of our Torah portion, the sages provided a curious description of the level of rain (*Ta'anit* 22b-23a):



The Sages taught: "Then I will give your rains in their season" (Lev. 26:4) - Neither drunk nor thirsty; rather, a medium amount. For as long as the rains are abundant, they muddy the land, and it does not give out its produce. Alternatively, "In their season" - on Tuesday nights and on Friday nights.

תנו רבנן: "וְנָתַתִּי גְשָׁמֵיכֶם בְּעֵתָם", לא שכורה, ולא צמא, אלא בינונית. שכל זמן שהגשמים מרובין — מטשטשין את הארץ ואינה מוציאה פירות. דבר אחר: "בְּעֵתָם" — בלילי רביעיות ובלילי שבתות.

While this publication usually considers drinking within the scope of humans, creatures, and even the Divine, considering an inanimate object as being drunk is certainly a first in these pages. While the sages are clearly using poetic license to describe the levels of rain being provided to the land, it is, nevertheless, not an obvious terminology to use with regards to providing rain to land for crops. One wonders about how much this is a lens through which to view human drinking: of those who are sober at the moment, those who are drunk at the moment, and those who are drinking some in the moment, yet fitting into neither of those categories.

L'chaim 

In his footnote to that line, he writes:

Rabbi Shmuel Greenberger wrote (Respona Fragrant Blends (\$15): "It was mentioned at the time of water-pouring through Rabbi Mordechai Yehudah Leib Winkler (1844-1932), may his memory protect us, author of *Mordechai's Garments*, that he was particular about preserving old customs so that they would not be lost, heaven forbid. One time, the manager of a synagogue had not prepared beer for the night of Shavuot as they had practiced in years past. He then commanded his students that they should bring back beer for themselves, as he said that Jewish customs are Torah, referencing Rashi's commentary on *Shabbat* 88a that God cupped the children of Israel within Mt. Sinai — that it's a reference to a beer barrel."

בש"ת מרקחות בשמים (גרינבערגער) סימן ט"ו כתב ודכירנא בעת יצוקי מים על ידי מורי הגה"ק בעל לבושי מרדכי זכרוננו יגן עלינו שדקדק על כל מנהג ישן שלא יתבטל חש ושלום פעם אחת לא הכין הגבאי בבית הכנסת שכר על ליל שבעות כנהוג של משנים קדמניות ציוה על תלמידיו שילכו בעצמם להביאו ואמר מנהג ישראל תורה כי רש"י פירש במסכת שבת דף פ"ח עמוד א' כפה עליהם ההר כגיגית - כגיגית קוב"א שמשילין בו שכר עד כאן דבריו

While we don't typically see this custom practiced in our synagogues of having kegs of beer there to enjoy, it is certainly a lovely way of incorporating beer into one of our holidays. While you may now be considering tapping a keg of beer for your Shavuot enjoyment, perhaps you may still end up enjoying beer over the holiday.

L'chaim 

*Oneg Shabbas* is composed by, edited by, and published by Rabbi Drew Kaplan.

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