

ONEG SHABBAS



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Oneg Shabbas explores drinking in the weekly Torah portion, along with timely essays on drinking in Jewish life

Moabitesses Using Ammonite Wine for Seduction Rabbi Drew Kaplan

Towards the end of our parashah, we read of the following brief story (Num. 25:1-3):

> While Israel was staying at Shittim, the nation profaned themselves by fornicating with the daughters of Moab, (2) who invited the nation to the sacrifices for their god. The nation partook of them and worshiped that god. (3) Thus Israel attached itself to Baal-peor, and The LORD was incensed with Israel.

(א) וישב ישׂראל בשטים ויחל העם לזנות אל־בּנוֹת מוֹאב: ב) וַתִּקְרֵאן לַעַם לִזִבְחֵי אֵלֹהֵיהֶן וַיֹּאַכָּל העם וישתחוו לֵאלְהֵיהֵן: (ג) וַיִּצְמֵד

יִשׂרָאֱל לְבַעַל פָּעוֹר וַיְּחַר־אַף ה' בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל While reading this brief story, which is followed by negative consequences, it is easy to consider the first verse as we can simply imagine them being led astray by certain desires, which then led to the idolatry in the second verse, leading to God's immense anger at them in the third verse. Yet, our tradition has a midrash that does not imagine



this story to be so simple. Otherwise, wouldn't women from other

nations have caused these men to be led astray? Why them?

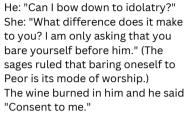
A commonly recurring midrash found in multiple works is the following (Sifrei Bamidbar 131:2):

"They came and sat in Shittim" (Num. 25:1) - in the place of straving. At that time. Ammonites and Moabites arose and built markets for themselves from Beth HaYeshimoth until Har HaShaleg, where they installed harlots, old ones outside and young ones within, who sold flaxen garments. And Israel ate and drank. At that time, a man would go out for leisure and seek to buy something from the old one, she would offer it to him at cost, whereupon the young one would call out to him from within, saying "Come and buy it for less," and he did so. The same, the next day and the day after. The third day, she would say to him "Come inside and pick for yourself - you're like one of the family." He obliged. The pitcher near her was full of Ammonite wine, the wine of gentiles having not yet been forbidden to Israelites. She would say to him: "Would you like to drink some wine?" He obliged, and when the wine burned in him, he said to her "Consent to me," at which she took אמרה לו: "רצונך שתשתה an image of Peor from under her breastband and said to him: "My master, if you want me to consent to you, bow down to

באו וישבו להם בשטים, במקום השטות. באותה שעה עמדו עמונים ומואבים, ובנו להם מקולין מבית הישימות ועד הר השלג. והושיבו שם נשים. ומוכרים כל מיני בשמים. והיו לישראל אוכלים ונעוחים באותה שעה אדם יוצא

לטייל, ומבקש ליקח לו חפץ מן הזקנה, והיתה מוכרת לו בשוויו; וקטנה קוראה ואמרה לו מבפנים "בוא וקח לך בפחות", והיה הוא לוקח הימנה ביום הראשון וביום השני, וביום השלישי אמרה לו "היכנס לפנים וברור לך "?לעצמך, אי אתה בן בית והיה נכנס אצלה, והצרצור מלא יין מיין העמוני, שעדין לא נאסר יינן של גוים

יין?" - והוא היה שותה, והיה היין בוער בו, ואומר לה "השמעי לי!" והיא מוציאה דפוס של פעור

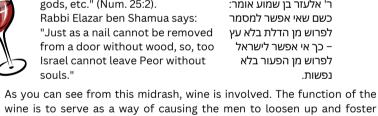


She: "If you want me to consent to you, 'veer off' from the Torah of Moses."

And he did so, as it is written, "They veered off to shame (i.e., to idolatry); and they became detestable (to Me) in loving (the daughters of Moav)" (Hoshea 10:10).

In the end, they reverted to (their practice of) making idolatrous banquets for them to which they invited them, as it is written, "And they (the Moavite women) called the people to the sacrifices of their gods, etc." (Num. 25:2).

מתחת פסיקין שלה, ואומרת לו: "רבי, רצונך . שאשמע לך? – השתחוה לזה!" ואומר לה: "וכי "?לע"ז אני משתחוה?" אמרה לו: "וכי מה איכפת לך? – אינו אלא שתגלה עצמך לו!" מכאן אמרו "המפער עצמו לבעל פעור הרי זה עבודה". והיה היין בוער בו, ואומר לה "השמיעי לי!" ואומרת לו: "רצונך שאשמע לך? - הנזר מתורתו של משה", והוא נזור, שנאמר (הושע ט׳:י׳) "וינזרו לבושת ויהיו שקוצים כאהבם." באחרונה חזרו לעשות להם מרזיחים, והיו קוראים להם ואוכלים, שנאמר "ותקראן לעם לזבחי אלהיהם". ר' אלעזר בן שמוע אומר: כשם שאי אפשר למסמר לפרוש מן הדלת בלא עץ כך אי אפשר לישראל – לפרוש מן הפעור בלא נפשות.



wine is to serve as a way of causing the men to loosen up and foster sexual desire, with the Moabitesses around. However, instead of this midrash describing these economic encounters that lead to sexual liaisons that could lead to intimate connections that would possibly lead to the Moabitesses to coax the men to idolatry, it positions the daughters of Moab as conditionalizing the sexual encounter upon the idolatrous consent.

While there is hesitancy by the men, they are convinced that all they have to do is to become naked, which it seems they were already planning on doing, yet the wine returns to the story once again to catalyze this activity. While there was some intrigue while shopping, what catalyzes the fornication followed by idolatry on the men's part is this Ammonite wine. Furthermore, it is fascinating to read of the parenthetical historical comment that this story took place prior to the sages forbidding gentile wine.

In this telling, while we do not understand the motivation of the Moabitesses, aside from getting these men to worship their gods, perhaps there is something more going on.

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Midrash in the Yerushalmi

In the Talmud Yerushalmi, we get an introduction to this midrash that demonstrates a motivation (Jerusalem Talmud Sanhedrin 10:2):

> Now what did the evil Balaam do [to וכי מה עשה בלעם warrant losing his portion in the world הרשע על ידי שנתו עצה It was because he gave advice to Balak לבלה בו צפור son of Zippor on how to cause Israel's להפיל את ישראל downfall by the sword. בחרב He said to him, "The God of this nation אמר לו אלוה של

> hates fornication. So put up your אומה הזו הוא שונא daughters for fornication, and you will את זנות אלא rule over them." העמידו בנותיכם He said to him, "And will [the Moabites] בזימה ואתם שולטין listen to me [when I tell them to turn

> their daughters into whoresl?" א"ל ומישמע לי אינוו He said to him, "Put up your own אמר ליה אקים daughter first, and they will see and בנתך קומוי וינון then accept what you say to them." חמיין ושמעין לך

In this introduction, Bilaam was seeking Israel's downfall, so this plan was put into place by offering up Moab's own daughters for such purposes, which also explains why the verse mentions "daughters of Moab".

Similarly to what we read in the previous iteration of the midrash, there is a multi-day progression in the market, leading to the men entering their tents, whereupon they encounter the wine (ibid.):

When he came in, [he found there] a flagon of wine, Ammonite wine, which היה שם צרצור מלא is very strong. And it serves as an aphrodisiac to the body, and its scent שהוא קשה והוא את was enticing. (Now up to this time the wine of gentiles had not been prohibited for Israelite use by reason of ועדיין לא נאסר יינן its being libation wine.) Now the girl would say to him, "Do you want to drink a cup of wine," and he would reply to her, "Yes." So she gave רצונך לשתות כוס יין him a cup of wine, and he drank it. When he drank it, the wine would burn in him like the Venom of a snake. Then

וכיון שהיה נכנס יין מן היין העמוני הגוף מפתה לזנות והיה ריחו מפעפע. ישראל והיתה אומר לו והוא אומר לה הין והיא נותנת לו והוא שותה וכיון שהיה





he would say to her, "Surrender שותה היה היין בוער בו yourself [sexually] to me." ככריסה של חכינה והוא She would say to him, "Do you אומר לה הישמעו לו want me to 'surrender' myself to והיא אומרת לו רצונך vou?" שאשמע לך And he would say "Yes." והוא אומר היו מיד היתה Then she took out an image of Peor מוציאה לו טפוס של פעור from her bosom, and she said to מתוך חיקה שלה והיתה him, "Bow down to this, and I'll אומרת לו השתחוה לזה ואני נשמעת לך surrender myself to you." And he would say to her, "Now am I והוא אומר לה וכי לע"ז אני going to bow down to an idol?" משחחוה And she would say to him, "You והיתה אומרת לו אין את don't really bow down to it, but משתחוה אלא במגלה you expose yourself to it." עצמך לו

In this version, the Ammonite wine is described as being very strong, as well as possessing an enticing smell, as well as aphrodisiacal, causing the men to be sexually aggressive.

Midrash in the Bavli

In this midrash's telling in the Babylonian Talmud, Bilaam brings not only a more focused strategic angle, but also knowledge that the Jews are in need of linen garments (Sanhedrin 106a):

Balaam said to them: "The God of אמר להם אלהיהם של אלו these Jewish people despises שונא זימה הוא והם lewdness, and they desire linen מתאוים לכלי פשתן בוא garments, as they have no new ואשיאך עצה עשה להן garments; come, and I will give you קלעים והושיב בהן זונות advice. Make for them enclosures זקינה מבחוץ וילדה using wall hangings and seat מבפנים וימכרו להן כלי prostitutes in them, with an old פשתן עשה להן קלעים woman outside the enclosure and a מהר שלג עד בית הישימות young woman inside, and have the והושיב בהן זונות זקינה women sell them linen garments." מבחוץ וילדה מבפנים

While we read of a similarity with this midrash's telling in the Bavli with that of the Yerushalmi insofar as God despising fornication, yet the real bait was this clothing. A further difference is both the manner of worship, as well as giving up Torah in this excerpt after she requests that he worship the idol (ibid.):

> She said to him: "And what is your ומה איכפת לך כלום concern? We are asking you to do מבקשים ממך אלא nothing more than defecate." פיעור But he does not know that its worship והוא אינו יודע is conducted in that manner. Once he שעבודתה בכר ולא עוד did so, she said to him: "Moreover, I אלא שאיני מנחתך עד will not leave you until you deny the שתכפור בתורת משה Torah of Moses your teacher"

This version of the midrash has defecation being the manner of worship rather than mere nakedness. Moreover, the push for him to deny the Torah is another addition here. While we do not read of a fascinating description of this Ammonite wine in this midrash as we had in the Yerushalmi, it yet again plays a pivotal part in this move for these men to seek out pleasure with these women.

Conclusion

While the abrupt narrative concerning our ancestors fornicating with the daughters of Moab speaks of this fornicating followed by idolatry, our sages viewed this story as having been lubricated by wine. While it's not clear why this wine comes from Ammon. it is definitely curious....





The Ammonite **Wine Midrash**

For more on the topic of this midrash, you can check out the Ammonite Wine Midrash episode of The Jewish Drinking Show, featuring Rabbi Reuven Chaim Klein.



The episode is available on YouTube and wherever you prefer listening to podcasts, as well as at

JewishDrinking.com/AmmoniteWine



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