

ONEG SHABBAS



THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

פרשת עקב - Vol. 4, Iss. 42 15-16 August 2025 - כ"ב אב תשפ"ד

This issue is sponsored by Alexis Kaplan & Josh Rosenthal in honor of both our 18th wedding anniversary and Rachel & Rabbi Drew Kaplan's 18th wedding anniversary. L'chaim!

Grapes, Wine, and Blessings

In the course of reading this week's Torah portion, we read of an agricultural blessing specifying seven species of the land of Israel (Deut. A helpful and straightforward articulation about this ordering of blessing 8:7-10):

(7) For The LORD, your God, is bringing you into a good land, a land with streams and springs and fountains issuing from plain and hill; (8) a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey; (9) a land where you may eat food without stint, where you will lack nothing; a land whose rocks are iron and from whose hills you can mine copper. (10) When you have eaten your fill, give thanks to The LORD, your God, for the good land given to you.

(ז) כִּי ה' אֱלֹקירָ מְבְיאֲךָ אֶל־אָרֵץ טוֹבַה אֶרֵץ נַחֲלֵי מַיִם עַיַנֹת וֹתָהֹמֹת יֹצָאֵים בַּבִּקעָה וּבָהָר: (ח) אֱרֵץ חָטָה וּשְׂעֹרָה וְגֶפֶן וּתְאַנֶּה וְרִמַּוֹן אֶרֶץ־זֵיִת שַׁמֵן וּדָבָשׁ: (ט) אֵרֵץ אֲשֶׂר לְא בְמִסְכֵּנָת` תּאַכַל־בַּהּ לֱחֶם לָא־תַחְסַר כַּל בַּהּ אֱרַץ אַשֵׁר אַבַנֵיהַ בַרוֵֹל ומהרביה תחצב נחשת: ָי) וָאָכַלְתָּ וְשָׂבָעָתָּ וּבֵרַכְתָּ אֶת־ה' אֱלֹקיךָ עַל־הָאָרֶץ הַטֹבָה אֲשֶׁר נֶתַן־לָךְ

This is not a set of obscure verses, as we often see synagogue art featuring these seven species.

Rabbinic Blessing Prescription

While understanding this verse as a blessing of produce, an early fourth century (Rabbi Yitzhak lived in the early 4th century and so, too, did Rav Yosef, as he passed away in 333) understand this verse as not merely casually mentioning these products, but that there is something special and specific about them for blessing upon them (Berakhot 41a):

Rav Yosef - and some say Rabbi Yitzhak אַמר רָב יוֹסֶף וָאִיתֵימא - said: "Each product that precedes in this verse takes precedence in terms of blessing, as it is stated: 'A land of wheat לָבַרָכָה, שֶׁנַאֲמַר: ״אֶרֵץ and barley, vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, (Deut. 8:8)."

רַבִּי יִצְחַק: כַּל הַמּוּקְדַּם בַּפַסוּק זֶה, מוּקְדַם חטה ושערה וגפן וּתַאַנָה וַרַמּוֹן אַרַץ זַיִת שֵׁמֵן וּדְבַשׁ״.



Medieval Formulations

of these products is provided by Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (1138-1204) (popularly known as Rambam and Maimonides), where he wrote (Mishneh Torah, Blessings 8:13):

If there were several types of food are placed before a person [at the same time]: If the same blessing applies to all of them, one should recite the blessing on one, and thus fulfill one's obligation regarding the others. If the same blessing does not apply to all of them, one should recite the blessing that is appropriate for each one individually. The order of precedence depends on one's desires.

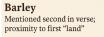
הָיוּ לְפָנָיו מִינִין הַרְבֵּה אָם הַיוּ בָּרְכוֹתֵיהֵן שָׁווֹת מִבָּרֵךְ עַל אַחַת מֵהֶם וּפּוֹטֵר אֶת הַשָּׁאָר. וְאָם אֵין בָּרְכוֹתֵיהֶם שַׁווֹת מִבַרֶרְ עַל כַּל אַחַת מהַן בַּרַכָה הַרְאוּיַה לוֹ. ואֵי זָה מַהַם שַׁיִּרצָה לְהַקְדִּים מַקְדִּים.

When there is no one type of food that one desires more than the others, [the order of precedence is as follows:] If among the foods there are foods from the seven species, the blessing should be recited over them first. The species that are mentioned earlier in the verse receive precedence with regard to the blessing. The seven species are those

mentioned in the

וָאָם אֵינוֹ וְהַשָּׁבְעָה מַן הָאַמוּרִים

Wheat Mentioned first in verse; proximity to first "land"



Olives (oil-producing) Mentioned first after second "land



because proximity to "land" is primary factor

Mentioned third in proximity to "land"

grapes' earlier position in verse,



Pomegranates Mentioned fifth in proximity

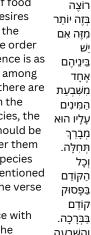
following verse, [Deuteronomy 8:8:] "A land of wheat, barley, vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olives that produce oil and honey." Honey refers to date-honey. Dates are given precedence over grapes because dates were mentioned second in proximity to the word "land," and grapes were mentioned third in proximity to that word.

בפסוק

זַה

אָרֵץ (דברים ח ח) ״אֶרֵץ חָטָה וּשִּׂעוֹרָה וְגֵפֶן וּדְבַשׁ זֵה הוּא דְּבַשׁ תִּמַרִים. וְהַתִּמַרִים קוֹדְמִין לַעֲנָבִים. לְאֶרֵץ וְהַעֲנַבִּים שָׁלִישִׁי לְאֱרֵץ

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Oneg Shabbas explores drinking in the weekly Torah portion, along with timely essays on drinking in Jewish life. Oneg Shabbas is composed by, edited by, and published by Rabbi Drew Kaplan. If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, he may be reached at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

If you are, or know of someone, who struggles with alcohol abuse, alcoholism, or other substance abuse, there are resources out there to help: JewishDrinking.com/AlcoholAbuse

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A subsequent medieval rabbi, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340), grapes would typically follow after consuming dates or date-honey, when provides not only a similar, straightforward articulation, but also includes a mention of not just grapes, but wine, as well (Tur OH 211):

Everything that appears earlier in the verse in which the land of Israel is praised, which is "a land of wheat and barley, of vines, figs, and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey" takes precedence in saying a blessing, even if the later one is more favored by the person. And this ordering is specifically up until pomegranate, but, from thenceforth, it is not necessarily so, since the latter mention of "land" in the verse interrupts the matter, and everything that follows that mention is more important than דארץ בתרא דכתיב those that follow from the first mention of "land" in the verse. Therefore, olives take precedence over barley, which is the first word following the latter mention of the word "land" in the verse, whereas barley is the second word following the first mention of the word "land". Similarly, date-honey takes precedence over grapes/vines, which is the second word following the latter mention of the word "land", whereas vines/grapes are the third word following the first mention of the word "land".

כל הקודם בפסוק שמזכיר בו שבחו של ארץ ישראל שהוא ארץ חטה ושעורה וגפן ותאנה ורמון ארץ זית שמן ודבש קודם לברכה אפילו אם המאוחר חביב עליו יותר ודוקא עד רמון אבל מכאן ואילך לא בקרא הפסיק הענין וכל הסמוך לו חשוב מהמאוחר ממנו לארץ קמא דקרא הלכך זית קודם לשעורה שהוא ראשון לארץ בתרא ושעורה שני לארץ קמא וכן דבש 'קודם לגפן שהוא ב 'לארץ בתרא וגפן ג לארץ קמא.

After this opening, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher then quotes a late 13th century rabbi that provides a bump in precedence for grapes that are turned into wine:

Rabbi Peretz ben Elijah of Corbeil (died 1295) wrote that that ordering is specifically if one is eating grapes, since its blessing is "Blessed...Creator of the fruit of the tree", but if one made wine from these grapes, the blessing for which is "Blessed...Creator of the fruit of the vine", then since it specifies the vine, it is significant and its being blessed over takes precedence over date-honey, as well as taking precedence over saying the blessing over olives, which is the first word following the latter mention of the word "land" in the verse, since the blessing over the wine is significant and takes precedence, whether the preconsumption blessing or the postconsumption blessing, since it includes the blessing over the wine along with the blessing over the fruits....

However, a cooked dish made from wheat or barley takes precedence over wine, because its blessing is "Blessed...Creator of types of sustenance", which is also significant due to its specificity, and these grains also appear earlier in the verse than

כתב ה"ר פרץ דווקא אם אוכל ענבים שברכתן בפה"ע אבל אם עשה מהם יין שברכתו בפה"ג כיון שמפרט בה הגפן חשובה וקודם לדבש ואפילו לזית שהוא ראשון לארץ בתרא כיון שברכת היין חשובה קודמת בין בברכה ראשונה בין בברכה אחרונה כשכולל ברכת היין עם ברכת הפירות כדפרשי' לעיל צריך להזכיר תחלה על הגפן ועל פרי הגפן ואח"כ על העץ ועל פרי העץ

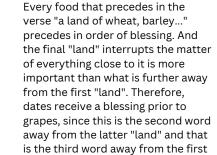
ומיהו מעשה קדרה דחטין ושעורין קודמין ליין לפי שברכתן במ"מ שהיא ג"כ חשובה שמבוררת וגם קודמים לו בפסוק

Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher's quoting of the late 13th century Rabbi Peretz ben Elijah of Corbeil provides a fascinating novelty: whereas eating

grapes are transformed into wine, the blessing over the wine advances over that of the dates/date-honey(!).

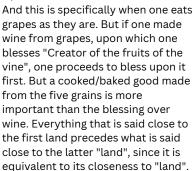
Shulhan Arukh and Beyond

In his succinct formulation of the blessing order in his Shulhan Arukh, Rabbi Yosef Karo (1488-1575) does not mention anything distinct about wine (OH 211:4):



כל הקודם בפסוק 'ארץ חטה ושעור קודם לברכה וארץ בתרא הפסיק הענין וכל הסמוך לו חשוב מהמאוחר ממנו לארץ קמא 'הלכך תמרי קודמים לענבים שזה שני לארץ בתרא וזה ג' לארץ

Yet, his Ashkenazi contemporary, Rabbi Moshe Isserles (1530-1572), does write about wine advancing the blessing of grapes in the order (gloss on OH 211:4):



ודוקא שאוכל ענבים כמות שהן אבל אם עשה מהן יין שקובע ברכה לעצמו בפה"ג חשובה והיא קודמת לברך עליו 'תחלה אבל מעשה קדיר מחמשת מיני דגן היא חשובה יות' מברכת היין כל הנאמר סמוך לארץ קמא קודם למה שנאמר סמור לארץ בתרא לאחר ששוה לו בסמיכה לארץ

Moving beyond eating, Rabbi Menahem Mendel ben Meshullam Auerbakh (1620-1689) considers other activities with these items (עטרת זקנים על שולחן ערוך אורח חיים רי״א:ב׳):



If they brought in front of someone wine to drink and good oil to smell, one should grab the wine in his right hand, blessing upon it, and then, afterwards, blessing upon the oil.

הביאו לפניו יין לשתות ושמן טוב להריח בו אוחז את היין בימינו ומברך עליו ואח"כ יברך על השמן

In addition to quoting Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher's quoting of Rabbi Peretz ben Elijah of Corbeil, Rabbi Auerbakh considers the precedence of drinking wine over smelling olive oil.

Conclusion

The verse in our Torah portion that mentions the blessing of the land of Israel with these seven species not only provides examples of produce bounty, but, as our sages saw it, a specific prescription for ordering blessings over fruits and other produce in our consumption. We further see that the vinification of grapes advances the blessing upon this grape product over all of the other fruit mentioned in the verse. As such, it seems, thanks to the innovative understanding of Rabbi Peretz ben Elijah of Corbeil, this turning into wine provides a "blessing bump" in precedental consumptive order, reflecting a significance in Judaism that wine is an improvement upon the base product, grapes. May we all experience the amelioration of grapes into wine and be able to experience the bounty of such blessings.





