

# ONEG SHABBAS

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## 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. 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.

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 - said: "Each product that precedes in this verse takes precedence in terms of blessing, as it is stated: 'A land of wheat and barley, vines, figs and pomegranates, a land of olive oil and honey, (Deut. 8:8).'"

(ז) כי ה' אלקינו מביאך אל ארץ טובה ארץ נחל מים עינות ותהמות יצאים בבקעה ובהר: (ח) ארץ חטה ושעורה וגפן ותאנה ורמון ארץ זית שמן ודבש: (ט) ארץ אשר לא במסכנת תאכל-בה לחם לא תחסר כל בה ארץ אשר אבניה ברזל ומתכרית תחצב נחשת: (י) ואכלת ושבעת וברכת את ה' אלקיך על הארץ הטובה אשר נתן לך

אמר רב יוסף ואיתימא רבי יצחק: כל המוקדם בפסוק זה, מוקדם לברכה, שנאמר: "ארץ חטה ושעורה וגפן ותאנה ורמון ארץ זית שמן ודבש".

### Medieval Formulations








A helpful and straightforward articulation about this ordering of blessing 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.

היו לפניו מינין הרבה אם היו ברכותיהן שוות מברך על אחת מהם ופטר את השאר. ואם אין ברכותיהם שוות מברך על כל אחת מהן ברכה הראויה לו. ואי זה מהם שיצרה להקדים מקדים.

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

ואם אינו רוצה בזה יותר מזה אם יש ביניהם אחד משבעת המינים עליו הוא מברך תחלה. וכל הקודם בפסוק קודם בברכה. והשבעה הן האמורים בפסוק זה

<b>Wheat</b> Mentioned first in verse; proximity to first "land"	
<b>Barley</b> Mentioned second in verse; proximity to first "land"	
<b>Olives (oil-producing)</b> Mentioned first after second "land"	
<b>Dates (date-honey)</b> Mentioned second after second "land". Precedes grapes despite grapes' earlier position in verse, because proximity to "land" is primary factor	
<b>Grapes</b> Mentioned third in proximity to "land"	
<b>Figs</b> Mentioned fourth in proximity to "land"	
<b>Pomegranates</b> Mentioned fifth in proximity to "land"	

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.

(דברים ח ח) "ארץ חטה ושעורה וגפן ותאנה ורמון ארץ זית שמן ודבש." ודבש זה הוא דבש תמרים. והתמרים קודמין לענבים. שהתמרים שני לארץ והענבים שלישי לארץ

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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.

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A subsequent medieval rabbi, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340), 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 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 דאריך בתרא דכתיב בקרא הפסיק הענין וכל הסמוך לו חשוב מהמאוחר ממנו לאריך קמא דקרא הלכך זית קודם לשעורה שהוא ראשון לאריך בתרא ושעורה שני לאריך קמא וכן דבש קודם לגפן שהוא ב' לאריך בתרא וגפן ג' לאריך קמא.

After this opening, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher then quotes a late 13<sup>th</sup> 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 pre-consumption blessing or the post-consumption 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 wine.

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 לאריך בתרא כיון שברכת היין חשובה קודמת בין בברכה ראשונה בין בברכה אחרונה כשכולל ברכת היין עם ברכת הפירות כדפרש' 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

grapes would typically follow after consuming dates or date-honey, when 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):

Every food that precedes in the verse "a land of wheat, barley..." precedes in order of blessing. And the final "land" interrupts the matter of everything close to it is more important than what is further away from the first "land". Therefore, dates receive a blessing prior to grapes, since this is the second word away from the latter "land" and that is the third word away from the first "land".

כל הקודם בפסוק ארץ חטה ושעורין קודם לברכה ואריך בתרא הפסיק הענין וכל הסמוך לו חשוב מהמאוחר ממנו לאריך קמא הלכך תמר' קודמים לענבים שזה שני לאריך בתרא וזה ג' לאריך קמא

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):

And this is specifically when one eats grapes as they are. But if one made wine from grapes, upon which one blesses "Creator of the fruits of the vine", one proceeds to bless upon it first. But a cooked/baked good made from the five grains is more important than the blessing over wine. Everything that is said close to the first land precedes what is said close to the latter "land", since it is equivalent to its closeness to "land".

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 יותר מברכת היין כל הנאמר סמוך לאריך קמא קודם למה שנאמר סמוך לאריך בתרא לאחר ששלו לו בסמיכה לאריך

Moving beyond eating, Rabbi Menaḥem Mendel ben Meshullam Auerbakh (1620-1689) considers other activities with these items (עטרת זקנים על שולחן ערוך אורח חיים ר"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 precedential 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.

L'chaim 🍷

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

