

ONEG SHABBAS

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

Nazir Grapes?

At the outset of this week's Torah portion, we read of something that significantly affects the supply of wine - the Shemittah year, which includes specific instructions regarding vineyards (Lev. 25:2-4):

Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of The LORD. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your **vineyard** and gather in the yield. But, in the seventh year, the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of The LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your **vineyard**.

דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם כִּי תֵבֹאוּ אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי נֹתֵן לָכֶם וְשַׁבְתָּהּ הָאָרֶץ שֶׁשֶׁת שָׁנִים תִּזְרַע שָׂדֶךְ וְשֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזְמַר כְּרִמְךָ וְאָסַפְתָּ אֶת־תְּבוּאָתָהּ: וּבַשְּׁנָה הַשְּׁבִיעִית שַׁבַּת שְׁבוּתוֹן יְהִיֶה לָאָרֶץ שַׁבַּת לַה' שָׂדֶךְ לֹא תִזְרַע וְכְרִמְךָ לֹא תִזְמַר

This seems that it would be tough to figure out wine for the seventh year, but, wait, there's more (Lev. 25:5):

You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the **grapes** of your *nazir*; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land.

אֶת־סִפְיֵי קִצְיֹרְךָ לֹא תִקְצֹר וְאֶת־עֲנָבֶיךָ נִזְיֹר לֹא תִבְצֹר שְׁנַת שְׁבוּתוֹן יְהִיֶה לָאָרֶץ

There's certainly a lot going on in these verses, but I want to focus on this non-translated word of נזיר - what are "grapes of your nazir"?

Guarded Vines

One thing we should look at is a rabbinic treatment of this, which is found in a midrash (ספרא, בהר, פרק א ג):

"and the grapes of your *nazir* you shall not glean" - From what is guarded in the land, you may not glean, but you may glean from ownerless.

"you shall not glean" - in the (usual) way of the gleaners

"ואת ענבי נזירך לא תבצור" - מן השמור בארץ אין אתה בוצר אבל אתה בוצר מן ההפקר. "לא תבצור" - לא תבצור כדרך הבוצרים

While this does not help us directly, there seems to be some sense of these grapes having been guarded from which we are not supposed to glean.



This is echoed later on by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known by his acronym,

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The Blessing of a Lengthy Grape Harvest

In our parashah, we read of 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. 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.

אִם־יִבְחַלְתִּי תִלְכוּ וְאֶת־מִצּוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעִשִּׂיתֶם אִתָּם: וְנָתַתִּי גֶשְׁמִיכֶם בְּעֵתָם וְנִתְּנָה הָאָרֶץ יְבוּלָהּ וְעֵץ הַשָּׂדֶה יִתֵּן פְּרוֹיו: וְהִשִּׁיג לָכֶם דִּישׁ אֶת־בְּצִיר וּבְצִיר יִשְׁגוּ אֶת־זֵרַע וְאָכַלְתֶּם לֶחְמֶכֶם לְשֹׂבַע וְיִשְׁבַּתֶּם לְבָטַח בְּאַרְצְכֶם



This verb בצר 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 earlier in this 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.) So what does it do and what are we to understand from its use?



Midrash Making the Connection to Drinking Clear

Before we get to our main questions, however, lest we harbor any uncertainty of these verses with regard to drinking, the midrash states (ספרא, בחוקתי, פרק א ח):

Lest you say "There is food and there is **drink**, but without peace there is nothing!" It is, therefore written "And I will put peace in the land" (Ex. 22:26) - to relate to us that peace is equivalent to all. And similarly God says, "(I) form light and create darkness. (I) make peace and create all" (Isaiah 45:7) - to relate to us that peace is equivalent to all.

שְׁמֵא תֵאמְרוּ ה'רִי מֵאֲכָל, ה'רִי מִשְׁתֵּה; אִין שְׁלוֹם, אִין כְּלוּם; אִין תְּלִמּוּד לֹמַר "וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאַרְץ" - מְגִיד שֶׁהַשְּׁלוֹם שְׁקוּל כְּנֹגֵד הַכֹּל. וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר (יִשְׁעִיָּהוּ מִחֵ, ז עֵין שֵׁם) 'עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם וּבוֹרֵא אֶת הַכֹּל' - מְגִיד שֶׁהַשְּׁלוֹם שְׁקוּל כְּנֹגֵד הַכֹּל.

This midrash connects our verses with the next reward (in a series of further rewards), which is the following (Lev. 26:6):

I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down untroubled by anyone; I will give the land respite from vicious beasts, and no sword shall cross your land.

וְנָתַתִּי שְׁלוֹם בְּאַרְץ וְיִשְׁכַּבְתֶּם וְאִין מַחְרִיד וְהִשְׁבַּתִּי חַיֵּי רֶעִה מִן הָאָרֶץ וְחַרְבַּת לֹא־תַעֲבֹר בְּאַרְצְכֶם

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{Nazir grapes, continued from previous page}

Rashi), as he wrote (רש"י על ויקרא כ"ה:ה; ד"ה נזיר):

| | |
|---|---|
| Those from which you barred people and from which you have kept them away, not having declared them free to everybody. | שְׁהֵנְרָת וְהִפְרַשְׁתָּ בְּנֵי אָדָם מֵהֶם וְלֹא הִקְדַּרְתָּם |
|---|---|

While the midrash may not have been clear on what it meant for these grapevines to have been guarded, Rashi takes it to mean that the owner of the vineyard guarded them from other people.

Untended Vines

A different understanding of this word and its meaning is described by Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270) (popularly known by his acronym, Ramban), as he first considers what Rashi wrote and goes in a different direction (רמב"ן על ויקרא כ"ה:ה; ד:ה את ספיו קציר):

Rashi understands this as saying:
"You shall not harvest the grapes of your unpruned vines' – meaning, you shall not harvest them in their (original) state of being set aside (as naziriteship), but rather, you must declare everything ownerless and harvest together with the poor."

The correct explanation of the verse is that "the grapes of your nazir" is like "the aftergrowth of your harvest", and "you shall not harvest" is like 'you shall not reap', because the subject of the whole passage is to repeat the law for both field and vineyard. It warns regarding the field and warns regarding the vineyard...

The meaning of the verse is that that which grows by itself in the field, without plowing or intentional sowing, is called "aftergrowth of the harvest" (ספיו קציר), because it is a continuation or overflow from the harvest of the previous year—based on the phrase "and they shall join themselves to the house of Jacob" (Isaiah 14:1), from the root meaning "to join".

As for the vine which has not been worked—no digging, no pruning—it is called "nazir" (נזיר, literally, "set apart"), because it has been excluded and separated from oneself, as though it is no longer one's own, based on the usage of the word in "who are estranged from Me through their idols" (Ezekiel 14:5) – meaning they have separated themselves from Me – and, similarly, in "they shall keep away from the holy things of the children of Israel" (Leviticus 22:2).

And Onkelos translates this verse as "you shall leave them" (Leviticus 25:5) - meaning that you have left them to be overgrown with thorns and wild plants.

הרב לומר ענבי
נזירות לא תבצור
אותם בנירותם
אבל תפקיר הכל
ותבצור עם
העניים.

והנכון בפירוש
הכתוב ש"ענבי
נזיר" כמו
"ספיו קציר" ו"לא
תבצור" כמו
"לא תקצור" כי
הענין בכל
הפרשה יכפול
הדין בשניהם
זהויר בשדה
וזהויר בכרם...

ופירוש הכתוב כי
הצומח מאליו
בשדה מבלי
חרישה וזריעה
לדעת יקרא
ספיו קציר שהוא
נספח אל קציר
השנה שעברה
מגורת ונספחו
על בית יעקב
(ישעיהו יד א)

והגפן שלא עבדו
ולא חפר ולא זמר
אותו ויקרא "נזיר"
כי הזירו והפרישו
ממנו כאילו אינו
שלו מגורת אשר
נזור מעלי
בגלוליהם
(יחזקאל יד ה)
פירשו ממני וכן
וינזרו מקדשי בני
ישראל (ויקרא
כ"ב:ב)

ואמר אונקלוס
(תרגום אונקלוס
על ויקרא כ"ה:ה)
"שבקך" שהנחת
אותם לשמיר
ולשית



It would seem from here that Ramban understands this term as that the owner of the vineyard, rather than guarding the vineyard, has actually been separated or aloof from these vines in the vineyard. He then continues to provide a fascinating image:

And it is possible that the custom in Israel – that a vineyard which is left fallow, not pruned and not cultivated, and overgrown with thorns and weeds – is called a "nazir" (נזיר), meaning it is a "nazirite vineyard", because a nazir is forbidden to drink wine and eat grapes, whether fresh or dried, and he does not tend to his vineyard (cf. Numbers 6). In the same way, long hair is called by the name of the nazir, as in the verse: "Cut off your nazirite hair and cast it away" (Jeremiah 7:29). This is the meaning of "the grapes of your nazirite" (נזיר). The general idea is that these are grapes which grow without the cultivation of the vineyard.

ויתכן כי המנהג
בשארל שהכרם
אשר הוא בתה לא
זומר ולא יעבד
ועולה שמיר ושית
יקראו לו "נזיר"
כלומר שהוא כרם
הנזיר מפני שהנזיר
אסור בין ובענבים
לחים ויבשים ואינו
עובד כרמו כי כן
יקראו השער
הארוך על שם
הנזיר גזי נזרך
והשליכי (ירמיהו ז
כט) וזה טעם ענבי
נזיר והכלל שהם
הצומחים מבלי
עבודת הכרם

The connection that Ramban is advocating in helping our understanding to translate these words is that there is a more direct connection to the nazirite, but not in the way we were thinking of avoiding grapes/wine, but rather having uncut and flowing hair as a nazirite would.

Rest for the Land

Having reviewed both Rashi's and Ramban's perspectives, Rabbi Ya'akov ben Asher (1270-1340) summarized (טור הארוך, ויקרא כ"ה:ה; ד:ה את ספיו קציר):

And this is the meaning of 'the grapes of your undressed vine': that which grows without the labor of the vineyard. For the verse prohibits harvesting what grows in the field on its own, and gathering the grapes that grow without cultivation for oneself alone and for one's own needs. Rather, the land shall have a complete rest—a Sabbath of solemn rest—from sowing and pruning. Furthermore, the Sabbath of the land means that whatever grows from the aftergrowth and the untended vines shall be for all of you alike—for you, for the poor, and for the wild animals and for the livestock

זהו פי' ענבי נזיר
שצומח מבלי עבודת
הכרם שאסר הכתוב
לקצור הצומח בשדה
מאליו ולבצור
הענבים הגדלים מבלי
עבודה לו לבדו
ולצורך עצמו אלא
תהיה שבת שבתון
לארץ מן הזריעה
והזמירה ותהיה עוד
שבת הארץ שכל
אשר תצא מן הספיו
והנזיר יהיה לכולכם
יחד ולעניים ולחיה
ולבהמה

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{Grape Harvest, continued from page 1}

Upon this verse, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known as Rashi) quotes this latter midrash in its entirety, including the piece regarding drink (ולא יקרא כיונה; ד"ה ונתתי שלום). In describing this connection of peace and enjoying one's consumption, Rabbi Yehudah Loew ben Bezalel (1512-1609) explains the connection (ולא יקרא על אריה גור אריה על ויקרא) (כיונה; ד"ה שמא תאמר):

Interpretation: What is the relevance of this verse here, after the blessing of satiety? It should have been written after "and you shall eat and be satisfied" (verse 10). Rather, it is because peace, too, is part of the blessing of satiety: if there is satiety but one does not eat it in tranquility, then the satiety amounts to nothing. Therefore, peace is everything, for peace sustains and gives meaning to all.

פירוש, מה ענין הכתוב הזה לכאן שהפסיק בברכות השובע, היה לכתוב זה אחר "ואכלתם ישן נושן" (פסוק י), אלא מפני שהשלום גם כן הוא מברכת השובע, שאם יש שובע ולא יאכל אותה במנוחה - אם כן השובע אינה כלום, ולפיכך הוא הכל, שהשלום מעמיד את הכל:



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 (ולא יקרא כיונה; ד"ה) (ובציר):

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.

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.

לא שיהא התבואה אינה מבושלת ויתאחר [הדיש] עד (הדיש) הבציר, שזו קללה ולא ברכה נגד ועץ השדה יתן פרוי, שיהיו פירות האילן כל כך מרובות, שהבציר שהוא בסוף הקיץ ישיג ויגיע עד זמן הזרע שהוא בחורף

In other words, there will be harvesting of not only the grains, but also the tree fruits, as well. A more fully articulated description is provided by Rabbi Meir Leibush ben Yehiel Mikhel Weisser (1809-1879) (popularly known as Malbim), who wrote (ולא יקרא על ויקרא; בחוקתי ו; ד"ה והשיג לכם דיש) (את בציר):

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.

דישת התבואה הנקצרת בניסן תהיו 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 לשובע וישרה הברכה במיעים



Midrashic Description

Going back to our original questions, a midrash describes it (פרא, בחוקתי, ופרק א ז):

"And your threshing will reach the vintage" - that you will be engaged in threshing when the vintage (season) arrives. "and the vintage will reach the sowing" - you will be engaged in harvesting when the sowing (season) arrives.

"והשיג לכם דיש בציר" - שתהיו עסוקים בדיש עד שיגיע בציר; "ובציר ישיג את זרע" - שתהיו עסוקים בבציר עד שיגיע הזרע

Rashi's 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 (ולא יקרא על ויקרא) (כיונה; 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 until the time of sowing.

שיהא הדיש מרבה, ואתם עסוקים בו עד הבציר, ובבציר תעסקו עד שעת הזרע

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. There are a couple of later commentators on this explanation of Rashi that further help clarify what is going on here.

The first of these is Rabbi Elijah Mizrahi (1455-1526), who clarified (ומרחי, ויקרא כיונה; ד"ה והשיג לכם דיש את בציר):

Not that you will be preoccupied with other affairs, and you will be unable to thresh it until the harvest; this is a curse, not a blessing.

לא שתהיו טרודים בשאר עסקים ולא תוכלו לדוש אותו עד הבציר שזו קללה היא ולא ברכה



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, provided we follow God's מצוות וחוקים, the various instructions we are to carry out that He has commanded us. As we consider this, it's important for us to consider that, amongst the rewards listed in this chapter for following these commandments and statutes, an abundant wine harvest is contained within them. Even following these commandments has a drinking connection!

L'chaim



{Nazir grapes, continued from previous page}

19th Century Perspectives

Ramban's perspective is echoed and succinctly described by Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855), who wrote (ביאור יש"ר על התורה, ויקרא כ"ה:ה'),

(ד"ה ענבי נזיר):

The vineyard that is not pruned will be called a nazirite's vineyard, whose vines resemble the nazirite's unshaven hair, and the vines will also be called nazirites for this similarity, and you will not harvest them like the owner of the vineyard, but will be ownerless.

A later 19th century rabbi, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (1808-1888) wrote on this, however, in a different direction:

Nazir (נזיר) – "Nazir'kha" ("your nazir"):
This refers to anything from which, due to its higher purpose or elevated character, other things are kept away. Hence the term *nezer* – a diadem or crown – as a symbol of such elevated separation. "*Nazir echav*" ("the crowned one among his brothers" – Genesis 49:26). Similarly, the *Nazir* in Numbers chapter 6 – one who separates themselves for a holy purpose. Here, *nazir* refers to the vineyard, which in the Sabbatical year is meant to reflect a status of dedication to God, and from which the hand of the vintner must be withheld.

In Rabbi Hirsch's perspective, then, this description of the grapes is meant to connect with the nazirite of Numbers 6, insofar as they are dedicated to God and separated.

Contemporary Translations

As we consider these approaches to considering this word, it does not seem as if there is a clear consensus from these rabbis. This is reflected in contemporary Jewish translations, as we read of Rashi's approach reflected in the translation as published by Artscroll:

- The aftergrowth of your harvest you shall not reap and **the grapes you had set aside for yourself** you shall not pick; it shall be a year of rest for the land.

On the other hand, Ramban's approach is reflected in others with regard to translating ענבי נזירך:

- You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather **the grapes of your untrimmed vines**; it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. (JPS)
- That which groweth of itself of thy harvest thou shalt not reap, and **the grapes of thy undressed vine thou shalt not gather**; it shall be a year of solemn rest for the land. (Dr. JH Hertz (Soncino))
- You shall not sow your fields or prune your vineyards; you shall not harvest what grows of itself or gather **the grapes of your unpruned vine**; it is a year of rest for the land. (Rabbi Jonathan Sacks (Koren))
- The aftergrowth of your reaping, you shall not reap. And **the uncultivated grapes of your vine** you shall not gather. It shall be a sabbatical year for the land. (Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz (Koren))
- Do not harvest crops that grow on their own and do not gather **the grapes on your unpruned vines**, since it is a year of rest for the land. (Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan)

In describing the words amidst 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.

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 curiosity in these pages. In describing what this word "drunk" means here, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known as Rashi) explains (פירוש רש"י על תענית כ"ב, ד"ה לא שכורה):

Not having drunk too much, such that it would obscure the land.

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. Moreover, this stands out in the Babylonian Talmud as the only such description of land/rain being drunk, leaving this descriptor to be primarily concerning humans (but also animals, on occasion).

Perhaps this rabbinic text can serve for some as intriguing fodder for lessons to be drawn from being drunk causing a lack of productivity: just as the fields that are oversaturated with water do not produce good produce, so, too, are people who are drunk not productive. However, the flip side may be considered, as well: those who do not drink enough may also not be productive or watered enough. Perhaps, as well, one could read this rabbinic text through the lens of Goldilocks and the Three Bears: there is a good balance to be achieved. May we all be appropriately watered.

L'chaim 

Conclusion

When we encounter this curious phrasing of "your *nazir* grapes" as something that is off-limits for our harvesting every seventh year from our vineyards, it could seem contradictory: after all, when we read of the regulations concerning the nazirite in chapter six in the book of Numbers, one of the items that is forbidden is grapes and anything associated with them, including wine. Yet, it seems that if there is any association with the *nazir*, it is to do with the flowing hair of the *nazir*, rather than the prohibition of anything grape-related, per se. And, of course, as readers of this publication are likely to know, grapes are merely precursors to that blessed beverage, wine. This also allows for the the indigent to more easily access wine, which is wonderful for the entire nation.

L'chaim 



Drunken Land?

תנו רבנן: "ונתתי
לשמיכם בעתם", לא
שכורה, ולא צמאה,
אלא בינונית.
שכל זמן שהגשמים
מרובין – מטשטשין
את הארץ ואינה
מוציאה פירות.
דבר אחר: "בבעתם" –
בלילי רביעיית ובלילי
שבתות.

