

ONEG SHABBAS

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

A Drinking Solution: Miriam's Well

Miriam Passes & Water is Lacking

Early on in our Torah portion, we read of the passing of Miriam, followed by the observation of the absence of water, immediately followed by fighting (Num. 20:1-5):

(1) The Israelites arrived in a body at the wilderness of Zin on the first new moon and the people stayed at Kadesh. Miriam died there and was buried there. (2) The community was without water, and they joined against Moses and Aaron. (3) The people quarreled with Moses, saying, "If only we had perished when our brothers perished at the instance of The LORD! (4) Why have you brought The LORD's congregation into this wilderness for us and our beasts to die there? (5) Why did you make us leave Egypt to bring us to this wretched place, a place with no grain or figs or vines or pomegranates? There is not even water **to drink!**"

(א) וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־הָעֵדָה מִדְּבַר־צֶן בַּחֹדֶשׁ הָרִאשׁוֹן וַיָּשֶׁב הָעָם בְּקִדְשׁ וַתָּמָת שָׁם מִרְיָם וַתִּקָּבֵר שָׁם: (ב) וְלֹא־הָיָה מַיִם לָעֵדָה וַיִּקְהָלוּ עַל־מֹשֶׁה וְעַל־אַהֲרֹן: (ג) וַיִּרֶב הָעָם עִם־מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לֵאמֹר וְלוֹ נָגַעְנוּ בְּגֹעַ אֲחִינוּ לִפְנֵי ה': (ד) וְלָמָּה הֵבֵאתֶם אֶת־קִהְלֵנוּ הַזֶּה לַמּוֹת שָׁם אֲנַחְנוּ וְבְעֵרְנוּ: (ה) וְלָמָּה הֵעֲלִיתֶנוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם לְהֵבִיא אֹתָנוּ אֶל־הַמִּקְוָה הַזֶּה לָּאֵין מַקְוֵה: (ו) וְלָמָּה יָרָע וְתֹאנְהוּ וְגַפְנוּ יָרְמוֹן וַיִּמְנוּ אֵין לְשָׁתוֹת



For readers of this publication, this final word likely stands out to us - "drink". Indeed, while verse 2 mentions there was no water for the community, part of their complaint in verse 5 is that there is no water to drink. Of course, water can be used for bathing or other such uses, but not even having water **to drink** is a critical matter.

Miriam and Water

Another aspect of the above is the difficulty in ignoring the juxtaposition of Miriam's passing and the absence of water. In fact, this connection is articulated by a turn-of-the-third century sage (*Ta'anit* 9a):

רבי יוסי ברבי יהודה אומר: שלשה פרנסים טובים עמדו לישראל, אלו הן: משה ואהרן ומרים. ושלוש מתנות טובות ניתנו על ידם, אלו הן: באר, וענן, ומן. באר – בזכות מרים; עמוד ענן – בזכות אהרן; מן – בזכות משה.

Rabbi Yossi, son of Rabbi Yehudah, says: "Three good sustainers rose up for the Jewish people; they are: Moses, Aaron and Miriam. And three good gifts were given through their agency, and these are they: the well, the cloud, and manna. The well in the merit of Miriam; the pillar of cloud in the merit of Aaron; manna in the merit of Moses.

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Seducing with Wine for Idolatry?

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) וַיֵּשֶׁב יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּשֵׁטִים וַיַּחֲלֵל הָעָם לְזָנוֹת אֶל־בָּנוֹת מוֹאָב: (ב) וַתִּקְרְאוּן לָעָם לְזָבְחֵי אֱלֹהֵיהֶן וַיֹּאכְלֵם הָעָם וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲווּ לְאֱלֹהֵיהֶן: (ג) וַיִּצְמַד יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבַעַל פְּעוֹר וַיִּחַרְרַף 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?

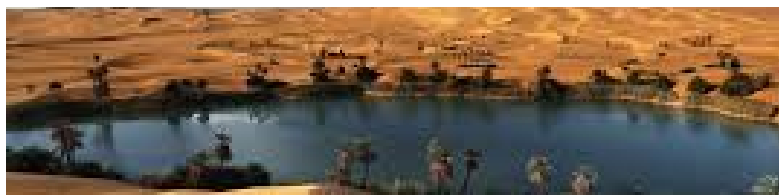
Midrash

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 straying. 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 an image of Peor from under her breast-band and said to him: "My master, if you want me to consent to you, bow down to this." He: "Can I bow down to idolatry?"

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 ושתיים. באותה שעה אדם יוצא לטייל, ומבקש ליקח לו חפץ מן הזקנה, והיתה מוכרת לו בשווי; וקטנה קוראה ואמרה לו מבפנים "בוא וקח לך בפחות", והיה הוא לוקח הימנה ביום הראשון וביום השני, וביום השלישי אמרה לו "היכנס לפניי וברור לך לעצמך, אי אתה בן בית?" והיה נכנס אצלה, והצרצר מלא יין מין העמוני, שערדין לא נאסר יין של גוים לישראל. אמרה לו: "רצונך שתשתה יין?" - והוא היה שותה, והיה היין בער בו, ואומר לה "השמעי לי!" והיא מוציאה דפוס של פעור מתחת פסיקו של שלה,

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

If you have any comments, compliments, or suggestions, feel free to reach out at Drew@JewishDrinking.com

{Miriam's Well, continued from previous page}

Commenting on Rabbi Yossi, son of Rabbi Yehudah's connection of these three siblings to these special occurrences for our ancestors, an anonymous sage of the Talmud then states (*Ta'anit* 9a):

When Miriam died, the well disappeared, — מתה מרים —
 as it is stated: "And Miriam died there" נסתלק הבאר,
 (Num. 20:1), and it says thereafter in the שבאמר: "ותמת שם
 next verse: "And there was no water for מרים", וכתוב
 the congregation" (Num. 20:2). But the בתריה: "ולא היה
 well returned in the merit of both Moses מים לעדה", וחזרה
 and Aaron. בזכות שניהן

It certainly seems as if this well disappeared when she passed, although what does it mean that the well returned in Moses' and Aaron's merit? Sharing her take on this Talmudic perspective, Maharat Ruth Balinsky-Friedman shared on episode 36 of *The Jewish Drinking Show*:

There's a connection between Miriam and water especially because, right after she dies, then they complain about there not being any water and so what the Gemara then alleges is that, when Miriam died, the well disappeared, which is why the people then complain that there's no water, but that, luckily, through Moshe and Aharon's merit, it then returned. It seems to be confined to the wilderness and also like we said, a logical thing to think is: "How are you going to have water?" There must have been some magical access to water. We know there was magical access to food with the *man*, so water, there also must have been.

It certainly seems as if this well disappeared when she passed; indeed, Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known as Rashi) drawing upon both Rabbi Yossi, son of Rabbi Yehudah's statement, as well as the anonymous statement from the Talmud (רש"י על במדבר כ"ב, ד"ה ולא היה מים) (לעדה):

From this verse, we understand that מכאן שכל ארבעים
 they had this well for 40 years on שנה היה להם
 account of Miriam's merit. הבאר בזכות מרים

While it does not ostensibly seem as if it was necessarily Moshe and Aharon's merit that the waters returned, yet, they still maintained some merit in that they were commanded to speak to the rock to yield water (Numbers 20:8), almost as if it would be restarting the relationship between the leaders and the rock [in order to provide water].

How come Moshe and Aharon didn't merit the well in the first place? This is something that Rabbi Shabbethai ben Yoseph Bass (1641-1718) considers (שפתי חכמים, במדבר כ"ב, ד"ה הבאר בזכות מרים):

For immediately after Miriam שהרי מיד כשמתה
 died, they no longer had water. מרים לא הי' להם
 You might ask: Why was the well עוד מים. ואם
 not in Aharon's or Moshe's merit? תאמר למה לא היה
 The answer is that it was in the הבאר בזכות אהרן
 merit of Miriam waiting for Moshe או משה, וי"ל בזכות
 by the water, to see what would שהמתנה למשה
 happen to him when he was על המים לראות
 placed there in the box [as a מה יעשה לו
 baby] (Ex. 2:4). In return, this כשהושלך בתיבה,
 merit of the well, i.e., the water לכן נעשה לה זכות
 that The Holy One Blessed Be He זה של באר דהיינו
 provided for the congregation מים שנתן הקב"ה
 was on her behalf. מים לעדה בשבילה



Miriam's Well

For more on the topic of Miriam's Well, you can check out the "Miriam's Well" episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show*, featuring Maharat Ruth Balinsky-Friedman.



The episode is available on YouTube and wherever you prefer listening to podcasts, as well as at JewishDrinking.com/MiriamsWell

The Well Created on the Twilight of Creation

Perhaps one of the most famous mentions of this well is not one that explicitly mentions Miriam, but does specify that פי הבאר "the mouth of the well" is one of the ten items that were created on the twilight of the creation Shabbat (*Avot* 5:6). Specifying Miriam's connection with this well is Rabbi Obadiah ben Abraham of Bartinura (1445-1515), who wrote (ברטנורא על משנה אבות ה"ו, ד"ה ופי הבאר):



Miriam's well that went with Israel in the wilderness on all of the journeys. And some say, that it opened its mouth and uttered song, as it stated, "rise up, O well; answer it" (Numbers 21:17).

בארה של מרים שהיתה הולכת עם ישראל במדבר בכל המסעות. ויש אומרים, שפתחה פיה ואמרה שירה, שנאמר (במדבר כא) עלי באר ענו לה



Description of The Well

One early rabbinic text provides quite the description of how this well worked to provide our ancestors with enough water to drink (*Tosefta Sukkah* 3:3)



...And thus was the well that was with Israel in the wilderness: it was like a rock perforated like a sieve, bubbling and rising like the mouth of this flask. It would go up with them to the mountains and descend with them into the valleys. Wherever Israel encamped, it would rest across from them, at a high place opposite the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The leaders of Israel would come and circle it with their staffs and recite over it the song, as it is said: "Spring up, O well—sing to it!" "Spring up, O well!" (Numbers 21:17). And the waters would bubble up and rise like a pillar upward, and each

...וכך היתה הבאר שהיתה עם ישראל במדבר דומה לסלע מלא [כברה] מפרפת ועולה כמפי הפך הזה עולה עמהן להרים ויורדת עמהן לגאיות מקום שישארל שורין הוא שורה כנגד במקום גבוהה כנגד פתחו של אהל מועד נשיאי ישראל באין וסובבין אותה במקלותיהן ואומרים עליה את השירה (במדבר כא) עלי באר ענו לה עלי באר והמים מבעבטין

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{Wine-Seduction, continued from page 1}

She: "What difference does it make to you? I am only asking that you bare yourself before him." (The sages ruled that baring oneself to Peor is its mode of worship.) The wine burned in him and he said "Consent to me."

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).

Rabbi Elazar ben Shamua says: "Just as a nail cannot be removed from a door without wood, so, too Israel cannot leave Peor without souls."

ואמרת 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,

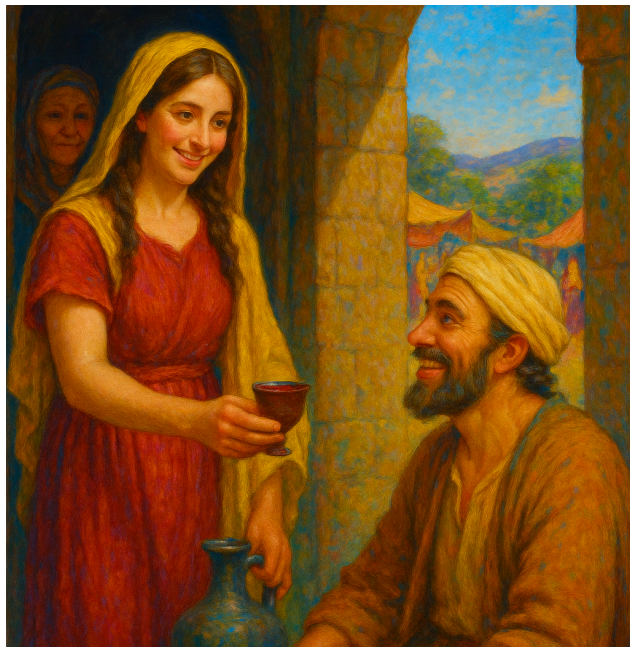
ואומר לה "השמעי לי!"
ואמרת לו: "רצונך שאשמע לך? - הנמר מתורתו של משה", והוא נזור, שנאמר (הושע ט"ו): "וינדרו לבושת והיו שקוצים כאהבם."

באחרונה חזרו לעשות להם מרחיחים, 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.

As you can see from this midrash, wine is involved. The function of the 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.

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

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 warrant losing his portion in the world to come]? הרשע

It was because he gave advice to Balak son of Zippor on how to cause Israel's downfall by the sword. על ידי שנתן עצה לבלק בן צפור להפיל את ישראל בחרב

He said to him, "The God of this nation hates fornication. So put up your daughters for fornication, and you will rule over them." אמר לו אלוה של אומה הזו הוא שונא את זנות אלא העמידו בנותיכם בימימה ואתם שולטין בהן

He said to him, "And will [the Moabitess] listen to me [when I tell them to turn their daughters into whores]?" א"ל ומישמע לי אינון אמר ליה אקים בנתך קומיו וינון 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 is very strong. And it serves as an aphrodisiac to the body, and its scent was enticing. (Now up to this time the wine of gentiles had not been prohibited for Israelite use by reason of its being libation wine.) וכיון שהיה נכנס היה שם צרצור מלא יין מן היין העמוני שהוא קשה והוא את הגוף מפתה לזנות והיה ריחו מפעפע. ועדיין לא נאסר יינן יין נכר של נכרים על ישראל

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 him a cup of wine, and he drank it. והיתה אומר לו רצונך לשתות כוס יין והוא אומר לה היין והיא נותנת לו והוא שותה וכיון שהיה שותה היה היין בוער בו ככריסה של חכינה והוא אומר לה הישמעו לו והיא אומרת לו רצונך שאשמע לך

She would say to him, "Do you want me to 'surrender' myself to you?" והוא אומר לה מיד היתה מוציאה לו טפוס של פעור מתוך חיקה שלה והיתה אומרת לו השתחוה לזה ואני נשמעת לך

And he would say to her, "Now am I going to bow down to an idol?" והוא אומר לה וכי לע"ז אני משתחוה והיתה אומרת לו אין את משתחוה אלא במגלה 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.

{continued on page 4}

{Wine-Seduction, continued from page 3}

Midrash in the Babylonian Talmud

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 these Jewish people despises lewdness, and they desire linen garments, as they have no new garments; come, and I will give you advice. Make for them enclosures using wall hangings and seat prostitutes in them, with an old woman outside the enclosure and a young woman inside, and have the women sell them linen garments."

אמר להם אלהים של אלו שונא זימה הוא והם מתאווים לכלי פשתן בוא ואשיאך עצה עשה להן קלעים והושיב בהן זונות זקינה מבחוץ וילדה מבפנים וימכרו להן כלי פשתן עשה להן קלעים מהר שלג עד בית הישימות והושיב בהן זונות זקינה 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 concern? We are asking you to do nothing more than defecate." But he does not know that its worship is conducted in that manner. Once he did so, she said to him: "Moreover, I will not leave you until you deny the Torah of Moses your teacher"

ומה איכפת לך כלום מבקשים מך אלא פיעור [והוא אינו יודע שעבודתה בכך] ולא עוד אלא שאיני מנחתך עד שתכפור בתורת משה רבך

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....

L'chaim 🍷

Gold Medalists

With the first-ever kosher-certified spirits competition having taken place this month, here are the gold medalists (in alphabetical order):

- **Catoctin Creek Roundstone Rye Cask Proof Whisky** (certified by Star-K)
- **Ruach Ascent Single Malt Whisky** (certified by OK Kosher Certification)
- **Tekiah Kosher Añejo** (certified by the Orthodox Union)



These three products were all awarded **Best in Show** 🏆🏆🏆

{Miriam's Well, continued from page 2}



person would draw with his staff— each according to his tribe and each according to his family, as it is said: "The well which the princes dug..." (Numbers 21:18).

ועולין כעמוד למעלה וכל אחד ואחד מושך במקלו איש לשבטו ואיש למשפחתו [שנא' (שם)] באר חפרוה שרים וגו'

Conclusion

While there is no explicit connection of the well of water flowing with Miriam, it is hard to ignore in this week's Torah portion that it stopped flowing upon her death. As such, our sages articulated this implicit connection, providing us with the consideration that her merit yielded water through this rock/well during her lifetime. Moreover, it was able to furnish enough water supply to provide sufficient hydration in the desert for our ancestors. Fortunately, for our ancestors, God then commanded Miriam's brothers to speak to the rock to yield water for our ancestors. I'm wishing you a plentifully hydrated Shabbat!

L'chaim 🍷

