

ONEG SHABBAS

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

When a Vineyard Holds One Back from Battle

When going to battle, you likely want to have soldiers who are not distracted or otherwise not fully present. Fortunately, Moses, in this week's Torah portion, recognizes this need (especially since he, himself, had been involved in multiple battles) and allows for men in certain circumstances to absent themselves from arranging for war. While two of the three examples Moses provides are not surprising, one is certainly unexpected. And, yes, it has to do with wine (Deut. 20:5-7):

(5) Then the officials shall address the troops, as follows: "Is there anyone who has built a new house but has not dedicated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another dedicate it. (6) Is there anyone who has planted a vineyard but has never [???ed] it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it. (7) Is there anyone who has paid the bride-price for a wife, but who has not yet taken her [into his household]? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another take her [into his household as his wife]."

While one can clearly imagine that a new house that is undedicated is certainly something that will stay on a man's mind, as well as a betrothed, but not yet married, wife, it is certainly curious that a planted vineyard should cause someone's mind to be distracted. Yes, I fully acknowledge that the word *ללו* is currently untranslated in the passage above, although we will return to that word. However, what do these three matters have to do with each other?

Talmudic Perspective on This Trio

In considering what these three activities have to do with each other, the rabbis of the Talmud provided the following insight (*Sotah* 44a):

Our Rabbis taught: "that has built" (Deuteronomy 20:5), "that has planted" (Deuteronomy 20:6), and "that has betrothed" (Deuteronomy 20:7) - The Torah teaches this in the way that people behave: A man builds a house, then plants a **vineyard**, and afterwards marries a woman. And even King Solomon said in his wisdom: "Prepare your work outside, and make it fit for yourself in the field; and afterward build your house" (Prov. 24:27); "Prepare your work outside" - this is a house; "And make it fit for yourself in the field" - this is a **vineyard**; "And afterward you shall build your house" - this is a wife.

(ה) וְדַבְּרוּ הַשְּׂטָרִים אֶל־הָעָם לֵאמֹר מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בֵּית חֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא חָנְכוֹ יֵלֶךְ וְיִשָּׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פְּרִימוֹת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר יִחְנְכֶנּוּ: (ו) וּמִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־נָטַע כְּרֶם וְלֹא חָלְלוֹ יֵלֶךְ וְיִשָּׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פְּרִימוֹת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר יַחְלֻלֶנּוּ: (ז) וּמִי־הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר־אָרַשׁ אִשָּׁה וְלֹא לָקָחָהּ יֵלֶךְ וְיִשָּׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פְּרִימוֹת בַּמִּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר יִקְחָנָהּ:



While readers of this publication may take it for granted that a vineyard, which is used for the production of wine, should be considered important, what is it about this activity that should hold this person back from entering battle? Let's first consider the other activities before moving on to the vineyard.

Dedicating One's House

When we consider dedicating one's house, what is it and what makes it worthy of holding one back from battle? Rabbi Abraham ben Meir Ibn Ezra (1089-1167) wrote (ד"ה חנכו), "ד"ה חנכו):

Like the dedication of the altar (Num. 7:10), and likewise "training a child" (Prov. 22:6) and, from this, our Sages of blessed memory learned that we train children. The reason that [one who has not dedicated his house is released from service] is that such a man's heart and desire is to dedicate his house. And behold, his heart is for his house, not for war; therefore, he will flee and cause others to flee.

כמו חנכת המזבח וכן חנוך לנער ומוזה למדו רבותינו ד"ל מחנכין את הנערים והטעם כי לבו וכל תאוותו לחנוך ביתו והנה לבו לביתו לא למלחמה על כן ינוס וינסו אחרים

This action of dedicating one's newly-built house sounds like it is an exciting occasion, especially since he has already done the hard labor of procuring the land, acquiring the materials, and all of that work to actually build the house. An alternative view is articulated by Rabbi Shlomo Yitzhaki (1040-1105) (popularly known as Rashi), who wrote (ד"ה ולא חנכו):

He has not yet dwelt in it. The term *חנוך* denotes beginning.

ולא דר בו, חנוך לשון התחלה

Whether we consider ibn Ezra's view or Rashi's view, both of them indicate that, despite all of the previous hard work, all that is left is a simple action.

Marrying One's Fiancée

With marrying an engaged wife-to-be, how exciting is it to have pursued this woman, developed a relationship, and now all that is left is simply the act of the wedding, itself? Like the dedication of one's newly-built house, this action seems to be one not only filled with excitement due to all of the previous work done to get to this situation, but also the added physical dimension of his excitement for carrying out the wedding, as well, which makes it quite understandable.

{continued on next page}

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{continued from previous page}

Doing What with One's Vineyard? View 1: Redemption

Now that we have explored these other two activities, what is this vineyard-related activity that is keeping this man from battle? In order to answer this question, we need to figure out this word of חללו - how do we understand it? There seem to be two linguistic understandings of this word amongst the Medieval rabbinic commentators. Rashi and Rabbi Moses ben Nahman (1194-1270) (popularly known as Ramban) understand it to refer to redeeming grapes and making them redeemed. Rashi wrote (רש"י על דברים כ"ו, ד"ה ולא חללו):

He has not yet redeemed it in the fourth year of its growth, for the fruits had either to be eaten in Jerusalem or to be given a non-holy character, by exchanging them for money and the money's worth to be consumed in Jerusalem.	לא פָּדָא בִּשְׁנָה הָרְבִיעִית, שֶׁהַפְּרוֹת טְעוּנִין לְאֶכְלָן בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם אוֹ לְחַלְלָן בְּדָמִים וְלֶאֱכֹל הַדָּמִים בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם
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Rashi is referring to the commandment to set aside fourth-year fruit for The LORD (Lev. 19:24), and that grapes may be eaten from the fifth year and beyond (Lev. 19:25). Ramban further explains this understanding as (רמב"ן על דברים כ"ו, ד"ה וטעם ולא חללו):

Scripture commanded that all the fruits thereof [of the fourth year] shall be holy, for giving praise unto the Eternal, that they should praise the Glorious Name at that celebration. It is possible that the meaning of חללו is "that he has not made it plain/secular" referring to the "redemption", which our Rabbis have mentioned.	צוה הכתוב (ויקרא יט כד) שיהיה כל פרי קדש הלולים שיהללו את השם הנכבד בשמחה ההיא ויתכן שיהיה פירוש ולא חללו שלא עשאו חולין והוא הפדיון שהזכירו רבותינו
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Doing What with One's Vineyard? View 2: Dancing

Conversely, the other linguistic approach is articulated by Ibn Ezra (אבן עזרא על דברים כ"ו, ד"ה חללו):

From the root of <i>halilim</i> (flutes), for their custom was to dance in the vineyards.	מגזרת חלילים כי מנהגם היה לחולל בכרמים
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Similarly, Rabbi Hēzekiah ben Manoah (13th century) wrote (חזקוני על דברים כ"ו, ד"ה חללו):

The term <i>halilim</i> (flutes), and their custom was already to dance in the vineyards, as we find with the daughters of Shiloh. And likewise, they planted vineyards and danced.	לשון חלילים וכבר היה מנהגם לחולל בכרמים כמו שמצינו בבנות שילה וכן נטעו כרמים וחללו
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The scriptural verse to which they are referring is that of Judges 21:20-21:

So they instructed the Benjaminites as follows: "Go and lie in wait in the vineyards. As soon as you see the daughters of Shiloh coming out to join in the dances, come out from the vineyards; let each of you seize a wife from among the daughters of Shiloh, and be off for the land of Benjamin."	וַיִּצְוּ אוֹתָם בְּנֵימִן לֵאמֹר לֵכוּ וְאִרְבַּתְם בְּכַרְמֵי וְרֵאיתֶם אִתְּכֶם אִשָּׁה בְּנוֹת־שִׁילֹה לְחַלּוֹת בַּמַּחֲלוֹת וַיִּצְאֲתֶם מִן־הַכְּרָמִים וַחֲטַפְתֶּם לָכֶם אִשָּׁה מִבְּנוֹת שִׁילֹה וְהִלַּכְתֶּם אַרְץ בִּנְיָמִן
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In considering these dances, Rabbi David Altschuler of Prague (1687-1769) wrote (מצודת ציון על שופטים כ"א: כ"א):

The matter of the dancing of joy, which is called in the language of flutes, for the way is then to sing with flutes, or it means to say, with instruments of dancing. And so it is: "and he saw the calf and the dancing" (Ex. 32:19).	ענין רקידת השמחה, וקרוי בלשון מחול, כי הדרך לומר אז בחלילים, או רצה לומר, בכלי מחול, וכן (שמות לב יט) וירא את העגל ומחלת
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When we read this story, we read that it is taking place at an annual feast to God (Judges 20:19), so it may very well be that these dances are taking place in the fall, near Sukkot, which would be at the end of the grape-harvest. If so, then this activity of flutes/dancing is a celebratory way of marking the conclusion of the laborious grape-harvest.

Medal-Winning Single-Malt Whiskies

With the first-ever kosher-certified spirits competition having taken place this summer, consumers in the market for single-malt whiskies may be curious about medal-winning whiskies at the inaugural Kosher Spirits Awards (in alphabetical order):



Gold Medal

- Ruach Ascent Single Malt Whisky (certified by OK Kosher Certification)

Silver Medals

- DS Tayman Blair Athol Bordeaux Single Malt Whisky (certified by the Orthodox Union)
- DS Tayman Linkwood Tulip/Syrah Single Malt Whisky (certified by the Orthodox Union)



Conclusion

When we consider these two approaches to understanding this word, there are two separate aspects that are important: linguistic and temporal. Regarding the linguistic connection, the reference to Leviticus 19:24 of חלל is a different word, where the ה is in place of the n. The other view, which maintains the same חלל root, referring to Judges 21:21, seems to be a stronger linguistic connection.

Perhaps a stronger argument, though, is when we consider the temporal aspect: whereas the desacralizing approach of Rashi and Ramban mandates waiting up to *four years* before serving in the army, the dancing approach of ibn Ezra and Hizkuni is simply a matter of holding a dancing event to seemingly celebratorily conclude the vine-harvesting season.

What is appealing to this latter approach is the context. Just as the man who has spent so much time, energy, and resources on building his new house only needs to dwell in it (Rashi) or perform a dedication ceremony (ibn Ezra) in anticipation of getting to live in it and enjoying his own place, as well as the man who has spent the time, energy, and effort in betrothing a woman only needs to perform the wedding ceremony in anticipation of being married and enjoying time with his new wife, why, then, would this potential warrior be held back for such a long time?

Indeed, it would seem that the man who has spent the time, energy, and resources in building, cultivating, and growing his vineyard in anticipation of enjoying his delicious wine, all he needs to do is to perform the ceremony of celebrating the end of the harvest, permitting him to then head off to battle. While there are many opinions that are convinced of Rashi's and Ramban's understanding of the multi-year exemption, I am not. As such, I am presently leaning towards this tentative translation, yielding the following:

Is there a man who has planted a vineyard but has never celebrated it? Let him go back to his home, lest he die in battle and another harvest it.

וְהִיאִישׁ אִשְׁרֵי־נֶטַע כָּרֵם וְלֹא חִלְלוֹ יֵלֶךְ וְיָשֹׁב לְבֵיתוֹ פְּרִימֻתוֹ בַּמַּלְחָמָה וְאִישׁ אֲחֵר יְחַלְלֶנּוּ



Wine, after all, is worth celebrating.

L'chaim

