ONEG SHABBAS

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

From Whom/Where Did Yaakov Source Wine?

Amidst the scene in which we read of Ya'akov simulating his brother in order to trick his father to earn his blessing (Gen. 27:1-29), we read of his father requesting food, with him providing food *and* wine (Gen. 27:25):

> וַיֹּאמֶר הַגִּשָׁה לִּי וְאֹכְלָה מִצֵּיד בְּנִי לְמַעַן תְּבָרֶכְךָ נַפְשִׁי וַיַּגֶּשׁ־לוֹ וַיֹּאכַל וַיָּבֵא לוֹ יַיִן וַיִּשְׁתְּ
>
> And he said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game so that I may give you my innermost blessing." So he served him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank.

While Ya'akov brought his father wine is understandable, it, however, is not mentioned as one of the items that his mother provided him to bring to his father, as we read (Gen. 27:17):

> וַתִּתֵּן אֶת־הַמַּטְעַמִּים וְאֶת־הַלֶּחֶם אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂתָה בְּיַד יַעֲקֹב בְּנָהּ
>
> Then she put in the hands of her son Jacob the delicacies and the bread that she had prepared.

So where did he get this wine, especially since his mother did not provide it to him?

Getting the Wine

One potential answer to this question is that he grabbed it along the way to bring the food out to his father. Another possible answer could be that even if his hands had been full while bringing the food out to his father, perhaps the wine wasn't far away from the table, so he was able to easily grab some and provide wine to his father.

Midrashic Possibilities

An imaginative midrashic statement envisions another source for this wine (מדרש תנחומא, תולדות ט"ז:ד'):

> מהיכן היה לו יין, הרי מצאנו שלא נתנה לו אמו יין, אלא ותתן את המטעמים וגו', ומי הביא לו יין, מיכאל הביאו לו יין מגן עדן
>
> Whence did Ya'akov get wine, since we do not read of his mother providing him wine [with which to provide his father]; rather, "and she gave him delicacies" (Gen. 27:17) - so who brought wine to Ya'akov? Michael brought him wine from the Garden of Eden.

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Why Did Yaakov Bring Wine to His Father?

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> And he said, "Serve me and let me eat of my son's game so that I may give you my innermost blessing." So he served him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank.

On the face of it, Ya'akov's bringing wine to his father while eating is nothing strange and, perhaps, wine was a common beverage accompaniment to meals. Yet, why does the verse describe him as bringing his father wine in addition to the food, when he didn't request it?

Wine Provided Because It Is a Meal

One possibility for his bringing his father despite him not requesting it would be that wine typically accompanied his meals. In this sense, Yitzḥak would have no need to specify to his son to bring him wine, since he would understand that he would need a beverage to wash down his food. Moreover, if there is to be a blessing offered, why not do so while in a good mood from the wine?

Wine for Blessing in the Right Mindset

One medieval Jewish commentator, however, thought otherwise, that wine was not typically served at meals. Rabbi David Kimḥi (1160–1235) wrote that Ya'akov brought his father wine (רד"ק על בראשית כ"ז:כ"ה, ד"ה ויבא לו יין):

> לשמח לבו שיברכהו בלב טוב, כי רוב מאכלם לא היה עם היין אלא במקום שזכר משתה
>
> In order to gladden his heart so that he would bless him with a good mind, because most of their eating was without wine, except for those verses that specifically indicate that there was a drinking-party.

This use of wine for getting his father in the right mindset would be that, even though Yitzḥak did not specify that he wanted to drink wine, he definitely did probably like to drink the wine at this time. This is certainly understandable, as we find that people like to drink alcoholic beverages in order to get themselves relaxed or otherwise feeling in good spirits for certain occasions, such as watching sports, chatting with friends, or other such similar activities. So why not also for providing special blessings?

While we can understand that they may not always have had wine at meals, to say that they only were drinking wine when a drinking-party is mentioned means that wine-drinking did not take place all that much in the Torah. Indeed, there are only five mentions of drinking-parties in the Torah, all of which take place in the book of Genesis.

I wonder if Rabbi Kimḥi did not expect drinking to take place so frequently throughout the Bible, perhaps as a reflection of what he saw in his day. Certainly, drinking takes place at drinking-parties in the Bible, however, why can drinking not take place outside of them? Moreover, we do read instances in the Bible in which they drank without the text specifying that it was called a drinking-party. As you can tell, I am not convinced by his

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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

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assertion on this matter. However, what is fascinating from his commentary is that he is trying to point out that this was a special occasion that involved drinking wine.

Wine to Confuse Him

Whereas Rabbi Kimḥi suggested that Yitzḥak wanted to drink wine, Rabbi Ḥezekiah ben Manoaḥ (1250-1310) suggested that Ya'akov provided wine to his father, since (חזקוני על בראשית כ"ז:כ"ה, ד"ה ויבא לו יין וישת):

that wine would confuse peoples' minds a bit, so Yitzḥak would not be able to precisely determine if he was Esav or not.	שהיין מערבב קצת דעתו של אדם ולא ידקדק אם הוא עשו אם לא

In this approach, it is not clear that Ya'akov even wanted the wine, but that he drank it since it was provided to him. Who knows? Maybe he happened to have been served the wine by his son and just went along with it.

This dulling of his thinking, however, is certainly a brilliant move on the part of Ya'akov. Despite whatever his father may have been thinking, this blurring of his discernment would help Ya'akov gain his father's blessing. We know that serving alcohol to people can make it challenging for them to accurately ascertain and assess what is going on around them. In this approach to considering why he provided wine, Ya'akov is seeking to provide cover for his deception.



Wine as Blessing

Fascinatingly, amidst Yitzḥak blessing his son, he blesses him with an abundance of new grain and new wine (Gen. 27:28), which seems that, as an expression of his gratitude for being provided this food and wine, Yitzḥak wanted to bless this son of his with these provisions, and did not feel tricked by having been provided wine. Indeed, perhaps the providing of wine would serve to create a feedback loop: whereas he served his father wine, he would be, in turn, blessed to receive a lot of wine. It is an investment in blessing returns for his wine in the future.

Conclusion

There are certainly numerous potential reasons as to why he provided it to him. The most pedestrian of all of these is that wine was normally consumed with meals - whether by people at that time or by Yitzḥak, in particular. Another approach is to consider whether wine was rarely consumed throughout the Bible, such as only specified as drinking parties. It may have been that Ya'akov brought it out as a fitting accompaniment for such a blessing or to help his father be in a happy mindset for providing such a blessing. In a more manipulative approach, perhaps he brought the wine to dull his father's discernment, or just simply to invest in the chances for the blessing of more wine for the future, despite his father not having requested it. Yet, it should be pointed out, even though he did not request the wine, his father still drank it and provided him with a blessing. May we all be blessed with such wine.

L'chaim 🍷

New Episode

The newest episode of *The Jewish Drinking Show* is now out, on the topic of *Rishonim* on the Additional Wine Blessing, featuring Rabbi David Fried.



The episode is available on YouTube, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, or wherever else you enjoy listening to podcasts, as well as at

JewishDrinking.com/RishonimAddlWine

{"Sourcing Wine", continued from previous page}

Our masters have said: "You only find wine resulting in a blessing in case of this story and with that story of Avraham, as it is said, 'And Malki Tzedek brought forth bread and wine' (Gen. 14:18), and also this story, as he drinks [the wine] and blesses him."	אמרו רבותינו אין את מוצא יין של ברכה אלא זה, ושל אברהם, שנאמר ומלכי צדק מלך שלם הוציא לחם ויין וגו' (בראשית יד יח), ואף זה כיון ששתה בירכו

With the opening question, there is certainly a fascinating assumption that Ya'akov only provided his father with items that his mother gave him. And, if his mother did not furnish this wine, who would have provided him this wine? As astonishing as it is that this particular angel provided him this wine, it is seemingly even more fascinating that it originated out of the Garden of Eden(!). While we previously discussed rabbinic midrashim on wine in the Garden of Eden in this publication (see *Bereshit*), this is seemingly unnecessary, as there is wine in the world and, perhaps, even already in their house, so why would an angel need to fetch it from the Garden of Eden? Does this midrash suspect that they lacked wine in their household?

In any event, another fascinating perspective emanating from this midrash is the notion that wine is only associated with blessing twice in the Torah, with this story being one of the two. This is certainly an interesting view, as we see wine used in some interesting ways in the book of Genesis, usually not in the context of blessings.

One final possibility is mentioned in another midrashic text (מדרש שכל טוב כ"ז:כ"ה, ד"ה ויבא לו יין):

[The wine came] from his mother, who guarded it in front of the door.	מאת אמו ששימרה לו לפני הפתח

In this midrashic explanation, while Ya'akov's mother did not provide it to him when she provided him with the food, she did have it ready by the door, so that when Ya'akov was bringing the food, he was then able to also grab the wine (whether he was able to grab it upon going in to see his father, or if his hands were to full and he was able to go back by the doorway to grab it is unclear).

Conclusion

When Yitzḥak asks for food, and Ya'akov brings not only the prepared dishes from his mother, but also wine...which she never handed him, the astute reader will wonder: Whence did he source this wine? While it is quite possible he grabbed it from somewhere in the house, maybe his mother stationed it nearby, or even the midrashic possibility that the angel Mikhael delivered wine straight from the Garden of Eden, Ya'akov certainly found a clever way to provide wine to his father. In typical rabbinic fashion, a seemingly minor textual gap invites a cascade of creativity and a renewed appreciation for how even a cup of wine can deepen the drama of a biblical moment.

L'chaim 🍷

Oneg Shabbas is a project of Jewish Drinking, a 501(c)3 non-profit initiative to educate about drinking in Jewish wisdom, tradition, history, practice, and more in order to enrich people's lives.
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