ONEG SHABBAS

THE UNOFFICIAL PARASHAH SHEET FOR KIDDUSH CLUBS

י"א כסלו תשפ"ז - Volume 6, Issue 7 20-21 November 2026 - פרשת ויצא

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

Why Did Lavan Throw a Drinking-Party *Only* for His First Daughter's Wedding?

When we read of Ya'akov's first wedding (Gen. 29:23), we read of a drinking-party taking place (Gen. 29:22), which seems festively appropriate:

And Lavan gathered all the people of the place and made a drinking-party.	וַיֶּאֱסֹף לָבָן אֶת־כָּל־אַנְשֵׁי הַמָּקוֹם וַיַּעַשׂ מִשְׁתֶּה

However, what is striking is that we do not read of any such celebration regarding his second wedding (Gen. 29:28):

Jacob did so; he waited out the bridal week of this [one], and then he gave him his daughter Raḥel as wife.	וַיַּעַשׂ יַעֲקֹב כֵּן וַיְמַלֵּא שְׁבֻעַ זֹאת וַיִּתֶּן־לוֹ אֶת־ רָחֵל בִּתּוֹ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה

If the text describes Lavan as having thrown a drinking-party on the occasion of one daughter's wedding, why does the text not do similarly for his younger daughter's wedding?

Literary Assumption

The first possibility as to why there was no such mention of a drinking-party taking place for his second wedding is simply that we, as readers, should understand that, despite the text mentioning nothing about a drinking-party for Ya'akov's second wedding, it, nevertheless, took place, since that would have been assumed in an implied repetition of how Lavan celebrates his daughters getting married.

Financial/Practical Reason

The second possibility as to why there was no mention of a drinking-party for Ya'akov's second wedding was that Lavan threw a drinking-party to celebrate welcoming Ya'akov into his family as his son-in-law. Thus, there would be no need to throw another drinking-party a week later, as he was already part of the family.



Publicizing for Social Reasons

A third possibility for throwing not only a drinking-party, but one in which Lavan brought a lot of people to celebrate, was to lock Ya'akov in socially to making it known that he was married to Leah and could not easily back out, as suggested by Rabbi Isaac Samuel Reggio (1784-1855) (ביאור יש"ר על התורה, בראשית כ"ט:כ"ב):

Lavan gathered...but there was no such mention of a drinking-party for Raḥel['s wedding], since Lavan's intention was publicizing it for the eyes of all of the people of the place, so that Ya'akov would not consider divorcing his wife the following day when he would see that she was Leah, causing him to be embarrassed amongst all of the people of the city that had ate with him at his wedding. There was no need to create a ruse for this wedding, since he knew that Ya'akov loved her very much.	ויאסף לבן אבל ברחל לא נזכר שעשה משתה, כי היתה כוונת לבן לעשות נישואי לאה בפומבי לעיני כל אנשי המקום, כדי שיעקב לא יתן אל לבו לגרש את אשתו למחרת בראותו שהיא לאה, ויתביישו מכל אנשי העיר שאכלו עמו בחתונתו, אבל ברחל לא היה צריך לתחבולה זאת, כי ידע שיעקב אוהב אותה מאד:

This form of socially locking Ya'akov in would ensure he would not just leave her. Once he is socially locked in through his marriage to Leah, there was no further need for Lavan to throw such a drinking-party for his wedding to her younger sister.

Getting Ya'akov Drunk on His Wedding Night

A fourth possibility, however, is something that seems quite possible:



Lavan only threw a drinking-party for Ya'akov's first wedding and not his second wedding in order to get him drunk so that he would be unable to carefully discern whom he was bedding on his wedding night. This was first suggested by Flavius Josephus (37-100), who wrote that, because it was

{continued on the next page}

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

{continued from previous page}

dark and he was drunk, he was not able to tell that he was not bedding Raḥel (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1:301):

> But when night came, he put the other of his daughters, who was older than Rachel and who was not beautiful in appearance, to bed with Jacob, who perceived nothing beforehand. And he, cohabiting under the influence of intoxication and darkness, then recognized her when daylight came and accused Laban of knavery.
> (Feldman translation, adjusted (by Rabbi Dr. Zev Farber)

This argument that Lavan threw this drinking-party to get Ya'akov drunk in order to not be able to distinguish amongst these women is further articulated by the Tosafists in the 12th century (דעת זקנים על בראשית כ״ט:כ״ב):

> Lavan was a swindler, and that is why he is always referred to by our sages as “Lavan the swindler.” He intended to make Ya'akov drunk off of wine in order to deceive him so that he could not tell the difference between Raḥel and Leah. You should know that, behold, by Raḥel, there is no such drinking-party.
>
> לבן רמאי היה ועל כן נקרא לבן הרמאי ונתכוין לשכר את יעקב ביין כדי לרמותו ולא יבחין בין רחל ללאה ותדע שהרי ברחל לא עשה משתה

Rabbi Yitzḥak Karo (1458-1535) further articulates this notion, yet differentiates Lavan’s party from previous instances of hospitality (תולדות יצחק על התורה, בראשית כ״ט:כ״ב):

> Lavan was unlike Avraham in that he gave them to eat (Gen 18:5-8), nor was he like Lot that he said, "he made them a drinking party and cooked unleavened bread and they ate" (Gen 19:3), rather, he made a drinking-party whose main item is wine, in order to get him drunk, so that he would not know if [the daughter he brought him] was Raḥel or Leah.
>
> לא כאברהם שנתן להם לאכול ולא כלוט שאמר ויעש להם משתה ומצות אפה ויאכלו אלא ויעש משתה שקביעותו עשה על היין כדי לשכר אותו בעבור שלא ידע אם היא רחל או לאה

Rabbi Karo points out that this drinking-party was dissimilar to



Karo points out that this drinking-party was dissimilar to previous such drinking-parties, where food was featured in addition to the drinking to help soak up the alcohol, whereas this drinking-party was more about the wine and, thus, more easily able to get Ya’akov drunk.

A more contemporary rabbinic commentator who also wrote of this motivation behind Lavan’s making a drinking-party for the wedding with Leah was Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin (1945-2020), who wrote (חיבה יתירה, בראשית כ״ט:כ״ב, ד"ה ויעש משתה קונטרס):

> [He made a drinking-party] in order to get Ya'akov drunk so that he would be unable to identify her as Leah, which is "and it was morning" - after his wine wore off, as in I Shmuel: "And, in the morning, when the wine went away..." (25:37).
>
> כדי שיעקב ישתכר ולא יזהה את לאה, וזהו ויהי בבקר אחרי שפג יינו כמו בשמואל־א (כה) ויהי בבקר בצאת היי

Another contemporary articulation, albeit not a rabbinic voice, is that of James Diamond, who wrote:

> Before leading his daughter to Jacob's bed, Laban prepared a "feast" (*mšth*). Under the cover of night, Laban introduced Leah to Jacob's bed and we hear of no reaction on Jacob's part until his astounding discovery the following morning: "And it came to pass that in the morning, Behold it was Leah" (Gen. xxix 25). As a result of the "feast", Jacob was lulled into a state of intoxication which lasted through the night and prevented him from clearly distinguishing his bed-mate. It was not until morning, when the effects of the feast had worn off, that Jacob learned who his conjugal partner was.
>
> ("The Deception of Jacob: A New Perspective on an Ancient Solution to the Problem", *Vetus Testamentum*, Vol. 34, Fasc. 2 (April 1984), 212.)

This language of realizing something upon waking up from a drunken experience in Genesis is that described by Rabbi Dr. Zev Farber:

> The story of Jacob and Leah may also be connected to the story of Noah and his youngest son (Gen 9:20-27). ... Both Jacob and Noah are described as only realizing or comprehending what happened to them in the morning, perhaps implying that it was not only the morning light but the morning’s sobriety that allowed each to realize his mistake.
>
> ("How Is It Possible that Jacob Mistakes Leah for Rachel?", *TheTorah.com* (21 November 2017).)

This connection between Noaḥ awakening from his drunkenness and knowing what had been done to him with Jacob waking up and knowing is quite the fascinating literary connection. However, Rabbi Dr. Farber also points out:

> This interpretation is certainly possible, but is absent in the text. In the stories of Noah and Lot, the text is very clear that the protagonist is drunk; no such statement is made about Jacob.

While this observation is certainly true that there is nothing stated explicitly about Jacob being drunk or waking up from his drunkenness, there is a lot that goes undescribed in Genesis, whether concerning sex and/or drinking, so one could read in between the lines, it would seem.

Nevertheless, one pushback against this intentional intoxication on Lavan’s part is just because he threw a drinking-party to celebrate Ya’akov’s marrying his daughter, how would he know that Ya’akov would drink enough to be intoxicated to the point of not being able to identify which of his daughters he was bedding? Then again: maybe Lavan and others made sure to get Ya’akov drunk as part of the ruse.

Conclusion

As we read of a drinking party to celebrate Ya’akov’s first wedding to one of Lavan’s daughters, we also see the glaring absence of a similar celebration upon his marrying the other of his daughters. Whether the drinking-party only took place for the first daughter, but not the second daughter, or whether a similar one did take place, albeit without mention, we do read of a drinking party for the first wedding. Whether it was simply a common practice or simply celebratory for Lavan to throw for his first wedding of his daughters, it was clearly a Biblical drinking story. While we don’t know the level of drinking that Ya’akov drank - whether any, drank some, or got drunk - perhaps even a little bit may have been enough for Lavan to dull Ya’akov’s skills at realizing who his bride was in the dark on his wedding night. Ultimately, Ya’akov still got tricked after a drinking-party at his [first] wedding only to realize it in the morning.

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.
Tax-deductible donations made be contributed at JewishDrinking.com/Donate