

Following Binyomin's arrival in Egypt, Yosef invited all his brothers to join him for a meal. Yosef showered his guests with gifts, and the atmosphere seemed most convivial. The description of the meal concludes with the unexpected phrase:

*וישתו וישכרו עמו (מג:לד)*

***"They drank and became intoxicated with him." (43:34)***

Based on (קל"ט) Rashi explains that since the day of Yosef's sale to Egypt, both Yosef and his brothers had abstained from drinking wine. This served as a symbol of mourning over his separation from the family. Now that they were re-united, they all saw fit to cease their abstention, and to drink wine once again.

Why did they become intoxicated – surely this is unfitting behaviour for the sons of Yaakov?

R. Avrohom ben HoRambam explains that the brothers did not drink to the point of drunkenness. The Torah's expression וישכרו denotes being cheered and slightly merry from the wine, but certainly not drunk.

The Tur answers that Yosef encouraged the brothers to drink heavily, and that they had to comply with his wishes. Yosef's hidden agenda was to make the brothers too drunk to notice the goblet that he planned to plant in Binyomin's luggage. A few pessukim later, we learn that the brothers were sent on their way at first light. This too was part of Yosef's plan; to hurry the brothers away before they could check their luggage.

R. Ovadia Seforno explains that the brothers were not familiar with the ways of royalty. When wine was first served at the meal, they helped themselves on the assumption that no further wine would be forthcoming. Other wines were duly offered, and they felt it would be impolite to decline. Contrary to their expectations, many varieties of wine were served, and they ended up inebriated.

Yalkut Me'Am Loez presents a different viewpoint on the scene. The brothers drank small quantities of undiluted wine. As such wine is very potent, the brothers would have become intoxicated had they drunk any considerable quantity. However, seeing as they only drank small quantities, they did not become inebriated.

Sefer Yefei To'ar explains that after twenty two years' abstention from wine, drinking even a small quantity was enough to inebriate them. Being unaccustomed to imbibing wine, they were incapable of holding even a small quantity of alcohol.

We can understand why Yosef could bring himself to end his self-imposed abstention - after all, he was now re-united with his brothers. However, at this point in the story, the true identity of this seemingly power-hungry Egyptian leader was as yet unknown to the brothers, so why did they permit themselves to partake of wine?

Gur Aryeh answers that the brothers were under the impression that Yosef still suspected them of spying. They therefore assumed that Yosef wanted them to drink heavily, in the hope that, in a state of inebriation, they might loosen their tongues and reveal some of their undercover plans. To decline to drink would only serve to heighten Yosef's suspicions of them. Seeing as they had no secrets to hide, they took a conscious decision to drink to excess, thereby confirming their innocence in all of Yosef's allegations.

*לעילוי נשמת החבר ר' שרגא פייבל בן החבר ר' חיים וולקנפלד – נפטר א' טבת תשנ"ח*  
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