Rejoice Before Adonai: The Rabbinic Concept of Simchah

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Abstract

This thesis, *Rejoice Before Adonai: The Rabbinic Concept of Simchah* by Jacob Singer-Beilin, examines the rabbinic concept of simchah, and its role in Jewish life. The rabbis speak of engaging in simchah in various ways, basing all of their beliefs on the Hebrew Bible and on life as they knew it. This work looks at the biblical texts that informed the rabbis' own uses of this term, and views concerning it. It also looks at ways in which the rabbinic concept of simchah has influenced later Jewish life and Jewish thought. Finally, it explores modern applications of the rabbinic concept of simchah, looking at ways in which it has been used by modern Jewish thinkers and places where this concept appears in modern Jewish life. This thesis analyzes primary biblical and classical rabbinic texts in their original language, and analyzes primary post-rabbinic texts in English. It also takes secondary scholarship on this topic in to account.

This thesis includes seven chapters dividing the topic as follows:

Chapter 1: An Introduction to Simchah

Chapter 2: Simchah and Sacrifice

Chapter 3: Simchah in Study and Worship

Chapter 4: Simchah Through Wine, Food, and Other Material Goods

Chapter 5: Simchah Through Caring Relationship

Chapter 6: Simchah at Specific Times

Chapter 7: Simchah in Our Time

The first goal of this work is to present and analyze rabbinic views on this topic and the ways in which these views have influenced Jewish life and thought. Second, this work

seeks to better understand the rabbinic project and show the reader how the rabbis reenvisioned Jewish life and practice after the Destruction of the Second Temple. This work is unique in that it focuses specifically on the term "simchah", and traces its use an meaning throughout Jewish history. It also presets a vision for the meaning and use of simchah in modern Jewish life, suggesting to the modern Jewish reader ways in which simchah may be relevant and meaningful while taking tradition into account.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks go to my thesis advisor, Dr. Joel Gereboff, who guided me through the process of creating this work with patience, support, and gentle critique. His willingness to work with me and challenge me made this work something I can be proud of, and made this process into one that was filled with joy and growth. I am also grateful to Dr. Dvora Weisberg, the director of my rabbinical program, and the individual who helped me gain the skills necessary for reading and interpreting rabbinic texts. Her passion for classical rabbinic texts is infectious. Her teaching made these texts accessible and showed me that they are incredibly relevant to modern Jewish life.

Thank you to my family and friends, who supported me throughout this process with love and understanding. I must also acknowledge those individuals who showed enthusiasm when I spoke about this topic. Their interest pushed me to make this work the best it could be. I hope all readers find this topic as interesting as I did, and see that simchah certainly has a significant place in modern Jewish life.

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Chapter 1

An Introduction to Simchah

Introductory Notes

This work deals with a large number of Jewish texts from throughout Jewish history. The major focus of this work is classic rabbinic literature, but it also includes numerous references to texts found in the Hebrew Bible, the *siddur*, medieval writings, Chasidic material, and works from the modern period. While most of these texts were originally written and read in Hebrew, I include texts that also were originally written in Aramaic, Yiddish, and English. I have chosen not to include most of these texts in their original forms, but have attempted to maintain the texts' meanings and feel when providing translations. While I worked with the majority of these texts in their original languages, I have relied heavily on the translations of others for this work. I have adapted these translations as need, always translating "simchah" and the words that contain this Hebrew root as "joy" or a related word. I have also attempted to use only the English word "joy" when the original text used the term "simchah", or something akin to this term. When English translations have used the word "joy" in conjunction with other words, such as *sason, rinah, gilah,* or *oneg*, I have changed the translation to a synonym for this word. I have been less systematic in translating these synonyms for simchah, meaning that *sason* may be translated as "gladness", "mirth", or "happiness". I have attempted to keep the relied upon translations as intact as possible. For texts from the Hebrew Bible, I have taken and adapted translations from the New Jewish Publication Society Translation – Second Edition, published in 1999. For rabbinic and post-rabbinic texts, the translations I include are indicated in the footnotes. If no translation for a rabbinic or post-rabbinic text is indicated, then the translation is my own.

It is customary to italicize foreign words in works such as this. I have done so for many transliterations of Hebrew words and phrases. There are, however, Hebrew words that appear in this text that I have chosen not to italicize. The most obvious example is the word "simchah" and the words that stem from this Hebrew root. Despite the fact that these words are foreign to the English language, they are used so frequently in this text that they lose this foreignness. Since this group of words is the topic of this work and the appear constantly throughout it, I saw no need to italicize them. Other Hebrew words that I have chosen not to italicize include the names of holidays, which are well known to the Jewish English reader and are used by Jews when conversing in the English language. Names of biblical and rabbinic characters, names of books or other historical Jewish works, and other terms that are used commonly amongst Jews when they are speaking English have not been italicized due to the fact that they are familiar to the informed English speaker.

There are places in this work where I speak generally about "the rabbis", "rabbinic texts", or "the rabbinic period". When I use these terms, I refer to figures, texts, and times that lived, appeared, or occurred approximately between 200 BCE and 500 CE. This time period encompasses the classical works of oral law: Mishnah, Tosefta, Babylonian Talmud, and Palestinian Talmud. It also includes several midrashic works. While the matter of dating these materials is up for debate, I have chosen to refer to some later midrashic works as rabbinic material because it is in the genre of works that appear in the rabbinic period. I know the dangers that accompany a general reference to a period, or a group of people, which is why I attempt to reference each text I use carefully and fully. The reader can therefore further explore a particular text, its approximate dating, and its genre if there are

questions or curiosities that arise.

While it is difficult to speak of the rabbis as a homogeneous group, I have chosen this term for the sake of linguistic flow. I am aware that the rabbis rarely present a united view on anything, and that a plurality of opinions existed and was preserved in the text. It is nonetheless useful at times to speak of trends within rabbinic literature concerning the ways in which they interpreted biblical texts, related to Jewish history, or presented terms and ideas such as simchah. In using this general term, we can get a sense of what simchah might have meant in this period, and how the common ways of using and relating to this term in rabbinic times were different from the common ways of using and relating to this term in modern times. By no means is this work meant to be an exhaustive analysis of rabbinic views on this idea. It is only meant to show trends of thinking and explore some of the various meanings Jews have taken from the term "simchah".

There are also times in this work when I speak of trends in later Jewish thought. For example, I speak of ways in which Chasidic leaders and thinkers viewed simchah and ways they believed Jews could engage in simchah. In reality, there was quite a bit of diversity within the Chasidic community. Some streams of this movement focused more on simchah through worship, singing, dancing and drinking than others. Communal leaders frequently disagreed with one another, and each of these leaders had followers who were particular to them. Despite this significant diversity, though, it is possible to speak about trends and opinions within the Chasidic community that were widely held and popular. I use this term to show the transformation and continuation of the meanings behind "simchah". At times this requires that I speak in general terms.

What is Simchah?

The question that this work will attempt to answer is: What is simchah and how do various Jewish thinkers believe Jews can express and experience simchah? While we may have an idea of what simchah, or joy, means in the modern world, we must not assume that joy meant the same thing to ancient Israelites or to early Jews.[1] The meanings of this term change depending on cultural contexts. It is likely that Jews in the pre-modern world experienced and expressed their joy in vastly different ways than Jews in the modern world. This work will explore what Israelites and Jews meant when they spoke of simchah, and how they saw it functioning in their lives. It is not even clear that Jews in pre-modern times used this term to speak about an emotional state. Instead, there was a strong performative element to this term. For that reason, I will argue that the texts, especially from the rabbinic period, call on Jews to *engage* in simchah rather than *feel* simchah. Throughout this work we will explore whether texts use this term in order to speak about an emotion or a behavior. Some texts present this issue clearly, whereas others are more ambiguous.

There are many words within the Hebrew language that have meanings similar to joy, but this work will focus on the particular meanings and nuances of the term "simchah". Avot D'Rabbi Natan[2] speaks of simchah as an umbrella term for joy under which other terms relating to joy fall. It states, "Simchah is called by ten names, they are: *sason,* simchah, *gilah, rinah, ditzah, tzoholah, alizah, chedvah, tiferet, and alitzah.*"[3] It is particularly

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[1] Anderson, Gary A. *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 18

[2] This is a commentary on m. Avot which is difficult to date. Although it is printed in copies of the Talmud, it is likely a Tannaitic text. Goldin, Judah. "Avot De-Rabbi Nathan", *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

[3] Avot D'Rabbi Natan, Version A, Chapter 34.

interesting that this text also presents simchah as a specific name for joy alongside the nine others. Simchah is therefore a general term as well as a specific one. At times it may serve as a catch all term, whereas at other times it may come with its own nuances and particularized meanings. It is due to this tension that simchah and its usage are valid subjects for a focus of study. There are texts in which this term is seemingly used interchangeably with the others mentioned above. There are also texts in which simchah is used intentionally and is done so to connote specific meanings that do not pertain to the other terms.

Yochanan Muffs argues that the term simchah has a particular meaning in Ancient Near Eastern texts, and even into the rabbinic period. This term, in his view, is separate from other terms that speak of joy. Muff demonstrates that in Ancient Near Eastern and ancient Jewish texts, the term "joy" is used in order to say that something is done willingly, or with volition. This is especially true when this term is used in legal texts, including contracts and covenants.[4] When joy is a part of the interaction, it makes the transaction final and incontestable.[5] In the tradition of the book of Chronicles, the rabbis believed that the best way to enter into a covenant was in simchah. If a covenant is entered into in joy, it is done without compulsion. According to one *midrash*, this is how the Israelites accepted the Torah – willingly, joyfully, and without divine compulsion.[6] The connection between giving and receiving Torah in joy will be explored below.

According to this reading of the term "simchah", gifts given to God or to other people should be given joyfully. A gift that is given without joy, or unwillingly, not only lessens its

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[4] Muffs, Yochanan. *Love & Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel.* New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. p. 144

[5] Ibid. p. 130

[6] Mekhilta on Yitro, 2, as presented by Muffs, p. 185

value, but this lack of joy might actually invalidate the gift.[7] In this interpretation, Muffs is presenting joy in the ancient world as an expression of volition that must accompany certain performative elements. Both love and joy, which are terms that the Hebrew Bible and later works use in legal discussions, connote a sense of an inner state of being. They are inner states of being that inform action and thus can affect the legal standing of accompanying actions. They are terms that point to an action done with volition and spontaneity, as well as zeal and enthusiasm.[8] This is exemplified in B'midbar Rabbah 12:16, which states, "All of Israel rejoiced in the work of the *Mishkan*, and brought in joy and enthusiasm everything that they desired."

While for the most part joy as willingness is presented in a positive light, Muffs believes it is possible for one to engage in too much joy or to do something with overzealousness. Sifra[9] presents a view that Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's sons who offered a strange fire before Adonai and were subsequently consumed in fire, acted not out of a base motivation, but out of simchah. It states, "They, on their part, acted in their simchah. For as soon as they saw the new fire, they spontaneously felt like adding (their) gift to the (divine) gift...they did not even consult with each other before they rushed forward."[10] This *midrash* shows the negative consequences of being overfilled with simchah. In this case simchah is presented as an overwhelming emotion of enthusiasm that leads to an improper action which has devastating effects. This is an important text because it shows that while simchah is a term used normally to connote a proper amount of volition, it can also be used to connote a

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7 Muffs, p. 171

8 Ibid. pp. 166-167

9 Sifra is a halakhic *Midrash* on the book of Leviticus, which was compiled in the Land of Israel not earlier than the end of the fourth century. Herr, Moshe David. "Sifra". *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

10 Sifra Tzav Milu'im, 1:15. Translation taken from Muffs, pp. 168-169

willingness that fails to respect legal restrictions.

Muffs presents simchah as an emotion and frame of mind that for the most part is desirable in a person when he is engaging in an action or set of behaviors. For Muffs, simchah necessitates this willing state of being; the actions themselves do not constitute simchah. He writes, "in our context it does not convey simple jubilation but rather a willingness and readiness unhampered by any inner reservation."[11] There is, however, a performative element in all of the examples he gives. Thus, simchah is inseparable from action even if it does not refer to that action in and of itself. One cannot be willing to engage in an action if there is no action in which to engage. Therefore, Muffs' reading of the rabbis' use of "simchah" is similar to the reading I will present in this work. In many of the texts we will explore, the rabbis call upon Jews not to feel simchah, but to engage in simchah.

Distinguishing Simchah from Similar Terms

The distinction between simchah and other terms such as *osher*, *sason*, and *gilah* exists in part due to the performative elements associated with simchah. Even as an emotion, simchah is different from *osher*, happiness, in that it is presented as a temporary and quantifiable state of being. As such, it is possible for the Hebrew Bible and for later Jewish literature to command Jews to engage in simchah. While the two terms are used somewhat interchangeably in colloquial English, I am making a distinction between the two in this work. Whereas joy is temporary, happiness in more of a permanent state of being. Joy usually requires some external presentation or performance, and happiness can be entirely internal. In my understanding and usage, joy is deeper, more grounded, and at times more

[11] Muffs, p. 155

intense than happiness.

It is striking that *osher* is not included in the list of names for simchah that we find in Avot D'Rabbi Natan. *Osher* and simchah, which in modern times are terms that are commonly conflated, seem to have been more distinct in the pre-modern world. This distinction is an important one, and should be maintained when speaking about Jewish texts and tradition. Jonathan Sachs, whose argument we will explore in the final chapter of this work, deals with the difference between the traditional Jewish concepts of simchah and *osher*, joy and happiness.

Hava Tirosh-Samuelson also associates *osher* with happiness and simchah with joy in her work, *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being.*[12] In her preface, she presents questions concerning the exact meaning and nature of happiness that Western philosophers have debated since ancient times. One such question is "Does [happiness] mean an overall satisfaction with one's life or an intense joy and momentary rapture?"[13] Her work is an examination of *osher* in the Jewish tradition, which she consistently translates as happiness. She presents *osher* not as an emotional feeling, but as a description of being in a condition of "flourishing". This work, on the other hand, is an examination of simchah and makes a clear distinction between joy and happiness, a distinction that does not exist in popular usage of these terms.

Scope and Sequence of this Work

This work is an analysis of the traditional concepts of simchah and the ways in which

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[12] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being.* Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003.

[13] Ibid. p. 1

Jews engage in it. It will examine ways in which the rabbis believed Jews should engage in simchah, the origins of these ideas, and the paths these ideas have taken after the rabbinic period. As mentioned above it is not an exhaustive list, but takes into account topics that appear frequently in rabbinic texts, topics that exemplify the rabbinic project, and topics that have been dealt with in particularly interesting ways in later Jewish literature and practice. The rabbis believed it was possible to engage in simchah in a variety of ways. Each one of these has some basis in the biblical text, and each one of them took on new meanings in the rabbinic period. This work will attempt to show how the rabbis worked with the biblical tradition and transformed it to fit their own times and visions of proper Jewish belief and action.

This work begins with a conversation about simchah through sacrifice, which was a core biblical idea with which the rabbis struggled. They struggled with this because, for the majority of the rabbinic period, there was no Temple and no sacrificial cult through which Jews could worship God and fulfill the commandment to rejoice through sacrifice. In this chapter, I also include a conversation about God's simchah. This is connected with simchah in sacrifice because Jewish texts present animal sacrifice as a source of God's rejoicing. While this is not the only way in which God can rejoice, it is certainly a central one.

We continue with a chapter on simchah through prayer and study, which were believed by the rabbis to be substitutes for sacrifice and were seen as proper vehicles by which the rabbis could fulfill the commandment to engage in simchah. Included in this chapter is a discussion in which the rabbis engage concerning the simchah that arises through receiving the Torah. The question of what constitutes joyful prayer is an interesting one that

has several answers in the biblical and rabbinic texts. This question is answered differently throughout Jewish history, which makes an exploration of this topic particularly enlightening for the reader who wishes to see the evolution of the idea of simchah in Jewish life and thought. It is in this section that we will explore the origins of song and dance as ways in which to engage in simchah in Judaism. Also included in this chapter is the topic of *simchah shel mitzvah*, which is a key rabbinic concept and plays a role in the later development of Judaism and the Jewish views of both simchah an *mitzvah*.

Connected to simchah in sacrifice is simchah through the consumption of food, drink, and other material goods. This is the topic of the next chapter. The rabbis deal with the fact that they can no longer experience joy in consuming sacrificial meat or engaging in a sacrificial feast. While the response to this new reality could have understandably been asceticism, the rabbis made it clear that Judaism would not be an ascetic religion. Instead, the rabbis argued for the possibility of engaging in simchah through the consumption and enjoyment of earthly goods. This is an idea that existed in the Hebrew Bible outside of the sacrificial cult, but is expanded in rabbinic and post-rabbinic literature.

We will then examine the biblical, rabbinic, and post-rabbinic views concerning men and women engaging in simchah through caring relationship. This includes discussions about simchah and its proper place in wedding ceremonies, marriages, sexual relations within marriage, and sexual relations outside of marriage. Like the views against asceticism regarding food and drink, we also find the rabbis negating the possibility for sexual asceticism. The rabbis speak about the possibility of engaging in simchah by means of sexual relations, even after the destruction of the Second Temple.

After analyzing many of the ways in which the rabbis believed it was proper and desirable for Jews to engage in simchah, we can explore when Jewish tradition calls on Jews to do so. In Jewish tradition, there are times when it is appropriate to engage in simchah and times when doing so would be inappropriate. The holidays and festivals play a major role in this chapter, as do life-cycle events and community events. For this reason, we will engage in an analysis of the *siddur* and its additions for Shabbat and other holidays. The rabbis engage in discussions surrounding whether or not Jews can experience joy in this world, or if we must wait for the world to come in order to truly experience joy. This chapter also looks at mourning periods as times in which Jews are not to engage in simchah, which is something the rabbis and later Jewish thinkers deal with in speaking about legal requirements and expectations.

The final chapter is one that takes the prior chapters into account and explores the ways in which modern Jews view simchah and engage in it. We will look at some modern Jewish thinkers and their ideas concerning simchah in Jewish tradition and in the Jewish present. We will also discover some recent Jewish publications that deal with this topic. This concluding chapter will also investigate modern Jewish practices concerning simchah and usages of this term in modern Jewish life. We place this discussion in the context of the modern secular world, which adds to the Jewish conceptions of joy, for whom joy is appropriate, how we engage in joy, and reasons we might do so. This chapter goes through the traditional ways in which Jews engaged in simchah, and explores whether or not those vehicles for simchah still speak to the modern Jew and can hold a place in current religious practice.

It is my hope that by reading this work, the reader will gain insight into the Jewish tradition and will reflect on the ways in which simchah functions in his/her life. This work is not a guidebook for engaging in simchah, but perhaps it will inspire the reader to think deeply about this subject and look towards the rich Jewish tradition for advice and for spiritual uplift. The changing nature of simchah and how we bring it into our lives is a fascinating topic, and is one that deserves the attention of the modern Jew. Knowing how the rabbis and other Jewish thinkers viewed this emotion and set of behaviors can inform our own lives. By studying the transformation of this concept from biblical to modern times, one can also become better acquainted with the rabbinic project and the history of Jewish thought, belief, and practice. I hope the reader finds as much joy in studying this topic and striving to better grasp it as I did.

Chapter 2

Simchah and Sacrifice

Simchah and Sacrifice in Biblical Texts

Throughout the Hebrew Bible, the word simchah is connected to the sacrificial cult and worship through sacrifice. The Tabernacle, and later the Temple in Jerusalem, were centers of Israelite worship, and were places where the Israelites as individuals and as part of a larger society could worship God, maintain their relationship with God, and fulfill the commandments of sacrifice that the Torah prescribes. It is therefore natural that the place of animal sacrifice would also be a central place where the Israelites would be able to experience joy. This chapter will examine the relationship between the acts of coming to the sacrificial centers, offering a sacrifice as worship to God, and joy.

Deuteronomy 27:7 makes clear the link between sacrifice and simchah, reading, "and you shall sacrifice there offerings of well-being and eat them, rejoicing before the LORD your God." Here, the Israelites are commanded to engage in simchah, a key component of which is bringing a sacrifice in worship, or *avodah*, to God. This word and its relation to sacrificial feasting is found throughout the book of Deuteronomy.[1] Eleven texts in the Hebrew Bible command the Israelites to "rejoice before the Lord", nine of which occur in Deuteronomy. The other two occurrences of this phrase are to be found in Leviticus and Numbers. While all books of the Torah speak about animal sacrifice as a way of relating to God, it is the book of Deuteronomy that strongly connects this act with simchah. Anderson believes Deuteronomy 12:11-12 is representative of the Deuteronomical references and their

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[1] Anderson, Gary A. *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 15

meanings.[2]

> "Then you must bring everything that I command you to the site where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name: your burnt offerings and other sacrifices, your tithes and your contributions, and all the choice votive offerings that you vow to the LORD. And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God with your sons and daughters, and with your male and female slaves, along with the Levite in your settlements, for he has no territorial allotment among you."

Here, simchah is related not only to offerings of well-being to be sacrificed on festival days, but to the act of sacrifice in general. It is abundantly clear that in this text, the acceptable site for sacrifice and rejoicing is at the Temple in Jerusalem rather than at any other cultic site. This text also opens up the possibility for people other than the male who is bringing the sacrifice to rejoice. If this text is indeed representative of all those in Deuteronomy that command the Israelites to "rejoice before the Lord", then there is no doubt as to the relationship between sacrifice and simchah in this book. It would seem that "the minimal legal requirement to rejoice entails taking one's sacred animal to the Temple, having it slaughtered, and consuming it amid the gathered family."[3]

The connection between sacrifice and simchah in the Hebrew Bible goes beyond the book of Deuteronomy. Joel 1:16 speaks of the end to sacrifices in the Temple also as an end to "joy and gladness". I Samuel 11:15 links sacrifice celebrating a war victory to the act of

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[2] Ibid. pp. 19-20
[3] Ibid. p. 20

rejoicing. In this case, simchah is connected to the specific well-being offering, or *shelamim*. This differs from the text quoted above from Deuteronomy in that the above text speaks of engaging in simchah through offering all types of sacrifices: burnt offerings, votive offerings, and other sacrifices.

Some biblical texts that mention simchah do not speak explicitly about sacrifice, but more generally about coming to the Temple or Tabernacle. In these cases, it is important to note that appearing at the Temple involved bringing a sacrifice. In Deuteronomy 16:16 we read, "They shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed." It was impossible to come to the sacrificial center without bringing a sacrificial offering, animal or otherwise.[4] Thus, when a psalm directs to the worshipper to come before the LORD, it is implied that an offering is included as part of that behavior. In this light, even though Psalms 100:2, which reads, "worship the LORD in joy; come into His presence with shouts of joy," does not speak explicitly of animal sacrifice at the Temple, it is clear that this joyful worship is taking place at the Temple and involves bringing some sort of offering. This is supported by the psalm's mention of God's "gates" and "courts",[5] which are references to parts of the Temple.[6] This offering need not have been an animal sacrifice. It was also possible to bring grain offerings, and offerings of other produce.

In Psalms 122, the connection between simchah and appearing at the Temple in Jerusalem is abundantly clear. It reads, "A song of ascents. Of David. I rejoiced when they said to me, 'We are going to the House of the LORD.' Our feet stood inside your gates, O

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Psalms 100:4

[6] Schaefer, Konrad. *Studies in Hebrew and Narrative Poetry: Psalms*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001. p. 246

Jerusalem."[7] This psalm makes explicit the link between joy and going to the Temple, which is more implicit in Psalms 100. Even though Psalms 122 describes clearly and unambiguously a journey to Jerusalem and to the Temple, it still does not mention the act of sacrifice. Here, the reader must make the connection that appearing at the Temple also meant bringing an animal sacrifice or other type of offering.

When the term simchah appears in relation to sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible, it is a legal requirement. This raises the questions as to whether simchah refers to an inner state of being or the behavior that accompanies that state. It would be quite difficult for any legal code to mandate an emotion or inner thought process. Since simchah appears in relation to sacrifice primarily in legal texts, it can then be assumed that sacrificial simchah involves a performative aspect.[8] Simchah refers to certain behaviors, which is why Anderson places particular importance on 2 Chronicles 30:23, which includes the expression "to do a joy".[9]

It is then fair to ask whether the Hebrew Bible requires that a state of joy accompany joyful acts of sacrifice. The answer is not so clear. If we are to take Muff's definition of simchah as volition, then there is surely an internal state that accompanies the behavior. He supports this idea by quoting from the books of Chronicles in several places, including I Chronicles 29:9, where the text speaks of the people making "freewill offerings" with joy and also with "a whole heart".[10] Although this text seems to clearly point to an inner state of joy that accompanies the joyful act of sacrificial worship, it may not be representative. This text is describing an inner state of joy that accompanies joyful action, but is it not commanding

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[7] Psalms 122:1-2

[8] Anderson, p. 20

[9] Ibid, p. 21

[10] Muffs, Yochanan. *Love & Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel.* New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. p. 184

the worshipper to feel joy while offering a sacrifice. It is much more difficult to command an emotion than it is to command action. The texts in Deuteronomy and Psalms 100, Psalms 122, I Samuel, and Joel are vague as to whether they are commanding and describing solely external acts and the will that should accompany these acts. These texts leave open the possibility for internal joy to exist, but perhaps do not find it necessary in order for an Israelite to have fulfilled the commandment of rejoicing. They do not say that emotion is necessary in order for one to engage in simchah.

Simchah and Sacrifice in Rabbinic Texts

The vast majority of rabbinic texts come from a time after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. This meant that sacrifices stopped and the Jewish people needed to find another way to worship God and maintain their relationship with God. The rabbis engaged in the complex, yet necessary task of making their religion and way of life relevant to this new reality.[11] This meant reinterpreting key texts and traditions that had revolved around sacrifice and the Temple. They needed to do this in a way that would also be familiar enough to the religion's adherents. They could not throw out the texts and traditions that spoke of the sacrificial cult, because that would mean throwing out the entire religion. The rabbis felt that they were links in the chain of Jewish tradition going back to Moses and even to the patriarchs.[12] They needed others to see them as such in order to succeed as communal religious leaders. Though no longer a physical reality, the Temple was still central in the people's religious consciousness, and the rabbis never denied the

[11] Fishbane, Michael. *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. p. 123

[12] m. Avot 1:1

importance of sacrifice.[13] Thus, they reinterpreted biblical texts that spoke of sacrifice and of the Temple. Sacrifice is therefore a key aspect of the rabbis' understanding of simchah, even though most did not practice it and had never seen it practiced in their lifetime. Just as simchah and sacrifice are related in key biblical texts, simchah and sacrifice are at times connected in rabbinic texts. Whether sacrifice was the primary vehicle through which the rabbis believed Jews could engage in simchah or only one of several vehicles through which they could do so is debatable, and will be explored throughout this work.

In classical rabbinic works, the rabbis, working from the biblical text, assumed the connection between simchah and sacrifice. Their discussions ranged from the legal to the narrative, to the philosophical. In halakhic discussions, the rabbis were more interested in discussing acts they could legislate rather than inner emotions and beliefs they could not, though they do not explicitly make a separation between the two. When we see them speaking about joy and sacrifice together they speak of them mostly as external acts. They discussed how these acts were practiced when the Temple was standing, how they should be practiced in their time, and how they should be practiced in the future. As an example of the rabbis speaking about how Israelites attained simchah before the destruction of the Second Temple, we find Rabbi Yehudah ben Betera's statement in b. Pesachim 109a, "In the time that the Temple stood, there is no simchah except for with meat (alluding to the product of animal sacrifice). As it is said 'and you shall sacrifice there offerings of well-being and eat them, rejoicing before the LORD your God.'[14]" Here, Rabbi Yehudah ben Betera reads the biblical text's connection of simchah with sacrifice and interprets it to say that sacrifice is the only

[13] Fishbane, p. 124
[14] Deuteronomy 27:7

moment in which people in biblical times experienced or enacted joy. He places primary importance on the Temple for being able to be joyful, and at the same time allows for the possibility that joy through sacrifice belonged to a time other than his own. This means that joy through other means may be achieved in his time and beyond, a time in which the Temple is not standing. In beginning his statement with the words "In the time that the Temple stood" he is perhaps making the point that joy through sacrificial meat existed in the era of the Temple, and joy through other means can exist in this era.

Another rabbinic text narrows the term simchah to refer only to those sacrifices that the Israelites could eat, the *shelamim*. A *midrash* on Deuteronomy 12:12, quoted above, makes this connection: "You shall rejoice [Deut 12:12]: Rejoice is stated here and in Deuteronomy 27:7. Just as in Deuteronomy 27:7 it explicitly refers to *shelamim*, so here rejoice refers to the *shelamim*."[15] Milgrom names the *shelamim* offering both "the well-being offering" and "the joyous offering", saying that its functions were to show thanks and to bring meat to the table of the common Israelite. He notes that "all joyous celebrations would have been marked by a well-being offering, the joyous sacrifice par excellence."[16] Milgrom makes this argument using biblical text, but the association of simchah with the well-being offering, or *shelamim*, also appears numerous times in Sifre and throughout rabbinic literature.[17] While this link exists in some places in the biblical text, rabbinic texts magnify and exaggerate the connection. In doing so, these texts also favor the performative aspect of simchah over the internal aspect. In the rabbinic interpretations of the commandment "to rejoice" as meaning the bringing of a *shelamim* offering, we see "the earliest model for

[15] Sifre to Deuteronomy 12:12, as quoted in Anderson, p. 23.
[16] Milgrom, Jacob. *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics – A Continental Commentary*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2004. pp. 28-29
[17] Anderson, p. 23

understanding the commandment [to rejoice] in halakhic discussion."[18] Since the rabbis are concerned primarily with the halakhic elements of simchah, they tend to equate it with certain external sacrificial acts.

Not all rabbinic texts, though, equate simchah of sacrifice in the time of the Temple with the well-being offering. Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael on Exodus 23:15 also allows for the possibility of simchah to refer to the sacrifice that is wholly consumed (*'olah*).[19] This midrash attempts to answer the question that arises when reading Exodus 23:15, "and none shall appear before me empty-handed." The question that arises is: What does one need to bring in order not to appear empty-handed? In answering this question, the *midrash* broadens the possibility to include the *'olah* offering. Since this offering is entirely consumed, and the meat of this offering cannot be eaten, it is an offering from which humans receive no joy. God, though, does receive joy from this offering. The idea of God's simchah is fascinating and will be dealt with below. In this rabbinic text, it appears that simchah does not only mean an external action, but may also mean an emotion that emerges from the consumption of a sacrifice. This emotion is spoken of in a halakhic text perhaps because it is not attempting to legislate a human emotion, but is legislating an action that affects God's emotional state.

Even though the rabbis were not engaging in animal sacrifices and arguably did not expect to do so in the immediate future, they found it necessary to discuss the ways in which they should be practiced. They took very seriously the biblical commandments to rejoice, both during holidays and other times, but were unable to do so in the way of their biblical

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[18] Ibid. pp. 116-117
[19] Ibid. p. 24

ancestors and in the way in which they believed God was calling them to do. It is interesting, then, that they would continue to equate commanded simchah with sacrifice. They did so because even though they were living in a new reality, their beliefs and practices still needed to be closely connected to those expressed in their core holy text, the Hebrew Bible. However, the rabbis spoke of the biblical commandments to rejoice on festivals from their own perspective. Due to the nature of the rabbinic project, the rabbis' legal discussions attempted to meld the ancient with the contemporary.

In b. Pesachim 71a we find the rabbis discussing how one would fulfill the commandment to rejoice on the festival of Pesach if the festival were to fall on Shabbat. In their hypothetical and perhaps even anachronistic discussion, they argue that one would not be able to cook sacrificial meat if the first day of the festival fell on Shabbat. In this case, they wonder, how would it be possible for the entire community, not just the priests, to fulfill the commandment of rejoicing on the festival? The difficulty arises from the supposition that, "There is no joy in raw meat." The rabbis in this discussion conclude, then, that there must be simchah outside of sacrifice. They decide that in this case, Jews can engage in simchah through "clean clothing and old wine." The consumption of cooked sacrificial meat is not absolutely necessary in order for the common Jew to engage in simchah and fulfill the commandment to rejoice on the festival. Thus, they start with the assumption that simchah is equal to the act of sacrifice and eating cooked meat, but break that assumption through the project of halakhic discourse. In projecting their current reality back into Temple times, the rabbis are able to expand their definition of simchah.

In some rabbinic texts, the term simchah is equated not to the act of bringing a

sacrifice, but to a type of sacrificial offering. [20] Although simchah and various sacrifices are spoken of together in biblical texts, nowhere does the Hebrew Bible present simchah as the name of a sacrifice. This is purely a rabbinic innovation. This nomenclature was not widespread, even in rabbinic circles, and does not reflect any practice in the Second Temple period. Some rabbis, though, arrived at this through exegesis.[21] In the halakhic collection of *midrashim* to Deuteronomy, Sifre, we find just such an exegesis. In Sifre 138 to Deuteronomy 16:11, Rabbi Jose the Galilean lists three *mitzvot* that are customary on festivals: *Re'iya*, *Chagigah*, and *Simchah*. He then equates each *mitzvah* with a type of sacrifice by the same name. Each type of sacrifice has its own rules and functions, and each is distinct from the others. "*Re'iyah*: All of it belongs to the Most High, which is not true for the other two. *Chagigah*: It was customary both before and after the Sinaitic revelation, which is not true for the other two. *Simchah*: It is customary for both men and women [to consume it], which is not true for the other two."[22] Thus, this rabbinic text sees joy not only as a necessary component of sacrifice, but presents joy as one and the same as a certain type of sacrifice. The two are inseparable. This is the *shelamim* offering, identifiable as such because humans can consume it.

This *midrash* is notable in that it continues the tradition of connecting simchah and the *shelamim* offering. In doing so, it labels the *Simchah* offering as the one that humans can consume. With this label, there is indeed a connection between the texts from b. Pesachim 71a, b. Pesachim 109a, and this *midrash*. These three texts all equate joy with the consumption of cooked sacrificial meat. This *midrash* also relates joy specifically to human

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[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 25

beings. By speaking of the sacrifice that humans consume as the Simchah offering, it is contrasting this action and the simchah connected to it with offerings that humans do not consume.

This text continues the biblical tradition of allowing women to enjoy the meat of the sacrifice, and may even allow a woman to be the worshipper who brings a sacrifice and benefits from it. From this text, we can assume that some rabbis believed women to be bound by the commandment to rejoice on the festivals and to do so through sacrifice. Anderson notes that the *midrash* includes women in this commandment in order to "harmonize Deuteronomy 16:14 with Exodus 23:14 and Deuteronomy 16:16. The first text commands that *all Israel* consume the sacrifice, while the other two texts command only the men to do so."[23] Anderson also argues that the this midrashic text attempts to harmonize the three biblical texts by adding in an unnecessary Simchah offering. In the Mishnah, the word *tachgog,* from which derives the *Chagigah* offering, is associated with joy. In this case, the commandment to rejoice would be fulfilled by bringing a *Chagigah* offering, otherwise known as the *shelamim.* In Sifre 138, though, it seems that an additional sacrifice is needed in order to fulfill this commandment. It adds the Simchah offering in order to bridge the gaps between the biblical texts and to include both men and women among the Israelites commanded to rejoice.[24] Here, we see a *midrash* redacted at least 300 years after the destruction of the Second Temple[25] concerned with the proper types of sacrifice, their functions, their names, and the commandments they fulfill.

We have seen the rabbis speak about the joy of bringing a sacrifice to the Temple in

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[23] p. 26
[24] Ibid.
[25] Herr, Moshe David. "Sifrei", *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

Jerusalem, even though they were not able to experience that joy themselves. There are also times when the rabbis speak of joy related to the Temple, and sacrifices are not the central element of the discussion. M. Sukkah 5:1 states, "It was said: 'Whoever has not experienced the joy of *Bet HaSho'evah* (the water drawing ceremony) has never experienced joy.'" The ceremony about which this *mishnah* speaks took place at the Temple amidst great fanfare and celebrations.[26] There were surely sacrifices that took place as part of this ceremony, but they may not have been the central joyful elements of the ceremony. This rabbinic statement is striking in that it does not place sacrifice as the most important joyful experience.

In this text, joy involves witnessing something external, but seems to have an internal emotional element to it. This *mishnah* does not say that anyone who has not experienced the joy of *Bet HaSho'evah* has never fulfilled the commandment of rejoicing on a holiday, rather it speaks of an unlegislated and internal feeling of joy. This is not representative of most rabbinic texts that speak of joy and sacrifice. Most of these rabbinic texts speak of joy in relation to sacrifice as a set of external behaviors, and as we have seen, some even equate joy with the act of sacrifice. In the texts above, worshipping through sacrifice and benefiting from that sacrifice is the pinnacle of joy; there is no joy without these elements. The *mishnah* above is rare in that it connects simchah to the Temple, but does not connect simchah to legislated behavior. In this case, joy arises within the worshipper as a result of a lived experience. Sacrifice may be the peak of commanded and behavioral joy, but there is another kind of experience that is the peak of emotional joy.

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[26] Anderson, p. 44

God's Simchah

So far, this chapter has examined simchah as a behavior or emotion of human beings. Jewish tradition also allows for the possibility of God's simchah. Psalms 104:31 allows for the possibility of God experiencing joy, "May the glory of the LORD endure forever; may the LORD rejoice in His works." Neither medieval nor modern commentators say much about this striking idea, but Rabbi David Kimchi, a medieval commentator,[27] argues that despite this verse, God is never joyful or sad. Instead, he argues that his psalm speaks about God in human terms so that the reader can better understand the point it is making about the wonder of God's creation. However, several rabbinic texts speak of God engaging in simchah. Mekhiltà of Rabbi Ishmael on Exodus 23:15 speaks of the need to have two types of offerings, one for the simchah of people and one for the simchah of God.[28] In this case, simchah refers to the joy one receives from a sacrifice of which one can partake. Thus, the sacrifice that relates to the simchah of people is the *shelamim*, and the sacrifice that relates to the simchah of God is the *'olah*, which is an offering that was entirely burnt up.[29] The smoke of a burnt offering was thought to benefit God, either as food or as a *re'ach nicho'ach*, a pleasing odor. Here, then, we see a rabbinic text describing God's joy at receiving an offering and benefiting from it. God's simchah arises through the consumption of a sacrifice rather than through engaging in the act of sacrifice. This is parallel to human simchah, which arises through the consumption of the *shelamim* offering. The *midrash* ends by asking the

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[27] The RaDaK, as he appears in Mikra'ot G'dolot, lived from 1160-1235 in modern day France and Spain. Tamalage, Frank. "Rabbi David Kimchi". *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

[28] Anderson, p. 24 includes a footnote illuminating the various versions of this text. The printed versions refer not to God's (*shamayim*) simchah, but to the simchah of *shelamim*. The manuscripts, though, refer to God's simchah. The logic of the *midrash*, he argues, only makes sense if it is read according the to the version found in the manuscripts. I have chosen to take Anderson's suggestion and use the version of the text that is found in the manuscripts that draws parallels between the simchah of people and the simchah of God.

[29] Ibid.

rhetorical question: "Should your table be full while the table of your maker is empty?"[30] It therefore draws a parallel between that which constitutes simchah for humans and that which constitutes simchah for God. The *midrash* makes this connection by arguing that Deuteronomy 27:7 refers to God's simchah. The biblical text is clearly speaking about the Israelites rejoicing before God, but through exegesis and the process of *midrash*, the rabbis expand and augment the text's original meaning. In doing so, they broaden the term simchah.

According to rabbinic texts, God does not only receive in joy, God can also give in a state of joy.

> "Rabbi Levi said: 'The Holy One, Blessed be He, revealed Himself to them at Sinai with many faces: with and angry face, with a downcast face, with a dour face, with a joyful face, with a smiling face, and with a radiant face. How? When He showed them the punishment [awaiting] the wicked, He did so with an angry, downcast, dour face; but when He showed them the reward [awaiting] the just in the World to Come, it was with a [joyful], [smiling], radiant face."[31]

Thus God experiences joy as one emotion among several when giving the Torah to the Israelite people. These emotions all include outward expressions and ways of presenting oneself. The mood is shown by the "face" that one puts on, and in the case of this *midrash*, we see the rabbis exhibiting a belief that God is able to put on a joyful face to express an

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[30] Ibid. p. 25

[31] Midrash Pesiqta Rabbati, translation taken from Muffs, p. 146. This midrashic collection is Palestinian and likely dates to the sixth or seventh century. Sperber, Daniel. "Pesikta Rabbati". *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

inner mood of joy.[32] God engages in simchah when giving the Torah, or at least parts of it, to the Israelites. While it is clear that God's simchah here involves a performative element, it seems that this text is showing God as experiencing and expressing some internal sense of joy.

God is presented by the rabbis as giving the Torah in a state of joy in another text, b. Berakhot 5a.

> It is the way of human beings that when one sells a desired item to another, the seller grieves while the buyer rejoices. But the Holy One, blessed be He, does not act this way. He [joyfully] gave the Torah to Israel, for scripture says: "A good teaching I have given you. Don't forsake my Torah" [Proverbs 4:2].[33]

This text presents God's joyful action and state of being in contrast to that of human beings. This does not mean that the joy God feels is different from the joy humans feel, but it does mean that the actions that inspire joy in humans may be different than those that inspire joy in God. In both of the above texts, God experiences joy by giving Israel the Torah. One could also say that God's giving of Torah is also an expression of joy. If we are to take Muffs' definition of simchah as willingness,[34] then these texts show God giving the Torah willingly, and not under duress. God is joyfully giving the Torah to Israel, and this act is a way in which God engages in simchah. The giving of the Torah constitutes a covenant

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[32] Muffs, p. 146

[33] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 106. I have changed one part of his translation, substituting the word "joyfully" for the word "willingly". The original Hebrew reads "*vesamach*", which may idiomatically mean God gave the Torah willingly, but words with that root are translated in this work the same way throughout.

[34] Anderson, p. 103

between God and Israel, and these texts show the reader that the covenant was made out of God's own volition because it was done in simchah. This willingness, or simchah, makes the covenant valid and irrefutable.

It is significant that the *midrash* from the late work, Pesiqta Rabbati, shows God giving the Torah with faces other than joy. If simchah signals willingness and therefore a valid contract, one must wonder whether the rabbis believed that the parts of the Torah God gave "with an angry, downcast, dour face" were not given willingly and are therefore not binding. Perhaps since these parts of the Torah are punishments for the wicked who will not uphold the commandments in the Torah, they by their very nature will not be upheld as binding. The wicked who break their covenant with God would not see the Torah as a binding covenant, even if these parts were presented joyfully and willingly. It is also possible that God does not present these parts of the Torah joyfully because God is showing inner emotions of disappointment, sadness, and anger in the knowledge that certain Israelites will not uphold the Torah and the statutes found within it.

The joy of Torah will be dealt with elsewhere, but in a section speaking about God's joy in giving the Torah, we must mention that God's joy mirrors Israel's joy in receiving that Torah. In accepting the Torah that God was offering, Israel allowed God to share joy with them. God and Israel rejoiced together because of their shared care for the Torah. These rabbinic texts do not make clear the connection between God's joy and Israel's joy, but they do presume that God enjoys sharing with Israel that which the rabbis find incredibly valuable: the Torah. Since the Torah is something in which the rabbis rejoice and in which they call others to rejoice, they imagine God either as echoing their joy or as the source of

their joy.

It is both in sacrifice and in the giving of Torah that the rabbis envision God engaging in simchah. In doing so, they show their belief that God and Israel can find simchah through similar means. The rabbis therefore present themselves as having common ground with God. God's joy influences the rabbi's joy, and it is possible that the joy of human beings also has an impact on God. They present God as rejoicing in those things that the rabbis believed had ultimate significance. They were no longer able to rejoice through sacrifice, and they were no longer able to help God experience the joy of sacrifice, which is why they presented substitutes for sacrifice. These substitutes would become core elements of Judaism, and in the rabbinical view, would become just as good as sacrifice itself. In making this transition, rabbinic Judaism "became a religion with sacral mysteries and supernal significance."[35] Torah is one such substitute in which the rabbis find joy and in which they imagine God finding joy, but there are many more, which will be explored throughout this work.

[35] Fishbane, p. 124

Chapter 3

Simchah in Study and Worship

Simchah in Torah Study

The rabbis engaged in the task of creating substitutes for the joy of sacrifice. One such substitute that appears in rabbinic texts is that of Torah study. We have seen above that the rabbis envisioned God giving the Torah to Israel with simchah, and getting a similar response from the Israelites who received it. Torah study is a key component of the life the rabbis lead and is also a key component of the life they wish others to lead. Given the importance the rabbis ascribe to Torah study, it is not surprising that they associate simchah with this practice. In some cases, it is presented as a substitute for sacrifice, and in some cases it is shown to have great value and bring significant joy in and of itself. The rabbis believed the Torah to be "a substitute for divine speech".[1] Therefore, studying Torah meant encountering God and learning about God's will. The biblical text is rarely self-referential, so the simchah of Torah study is not to be found within the Torah itself. Indeed, the idea of Torah study as the rabbis define it is nowhere in the Hebrew Bible. The closest mention we find is "The precepts of the LORD are just, rejoicing the heart; the instruction of the LORD is lucid, making the eyes light up."[2] Here is the biblical basis for rejoicing in God's teaching, but it is fleshed out much more in the rabbinic period. The core rabbinic belief that simchah and Torah study are linked is a rabbinic innovation, but as we will see, the rabbis do base such a belief on interpretations of the biblical text.

First, it is important to understand how the rabbis presented Torah study as a

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[1] Fishbane, Michael. *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. p. 129

[2] Psalms 19:9

substitute for sacrifice. In doing so, they were able to transfer the simchah of sacrifice onto the simchah of Torah study. In Avot de-Rabbi Natan, a section comments of the verse from Hosea 6:6, "For I desire goodness, not sacrifice; Obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings." The rabbinic text boldly interprets this text to mean "Torah study is dearer to God than burnt-offerings. For if one studies the Torah, he comes to know the will of God...Hence when a sage sits and expounds to the congregation, Scripture accounts it to him as if [*ke'ilu*] he had sacrificed fat and blood upon the altar."[3] A similar link between studying about a sacrifice and performing the sacrifice is made in the discussion found in Menachot 110a, which states, "whosoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the sin-offering is as though he were offering a sin-offering, and whosoever occupies himself with the study of the laws of the guilt-offering is as though he were offering a guilt-offering."[4] The text from Avot de-Rabbi Natan is particularly striking, because it not only equates studying about a sacrifice with actually performing it, but argues that it is better to study Torah than to perform sacrifices. It is clear from these texts that the rabbis see Torah study as a substitute to sacrifice and as having real power. In this way, the rabbis show Torah study as having all the benefits of sacrifice.[5] As we will see, one such benefit is simchah.

Numerous rabbinic texts speak of the simchah involved in receiving and studying the Torah. For example, the Tosefta states "Torah is beloved by all of Israel and everyone rejoices in it."[6] It is clear from these texts that Torah study was widely seen by the rabbis as an activity that could bring joy. There is only one rabbinic text, though, that presents simchah of Torah study and receiving the Torah as fulfilling the commandment to rejoice on

[3] Avot de-Rabbi Natan A IV
[4] Translation taken from Soncino
[5] Fishbane, p. 131
[6] t. Berachot 6:30. Other examples include Sifre 48, Sifre 306

a festival.[7] In b. Pesachim 68b, we find a long discussion about the proper ways for one to rejoice on a festival.

> [Rabbi Yehoshua] has said: "The joy of a feast day is also a commandment." For it has been taught: R. Eliezer says: "A man has nothing else to do on a feast day except eat and drink or sit and study." R. Yehoshua says: "Divide it up! Half of the day is for eating and half is for the house of study."[8]

The discussion continues with the decision that it is a commandment to rejoice in this way on the festival of Shavuot because that was when the Torah was given and the giving of Torah is a reason for rejoicing. They decide that the proper way to rejoice on the day the Torah was given to Israel is through Torah study. In other words, the giving of Torah is the reason for rejoicing, and Torah study is the vehicle by which the rabbis believe it is proper to engage in simchah. Thus, the joy of Torah study is a performed, commanded action that fulfills a requirement that exists due to the giving of Torah.

Simchah through Torah study is indeed good and is something for which the rabbis strive, but if we continue to read from b. Pesachim 68b, we find a portion that tells the reader that simchah may not be the ultimate goal of Torah study. Torah study, according to Rabbi Eleazar, allows for the continued existence of heaven and earth. While at first one may study the Torah for his own enjoyment, he must continue to do so for the sake of the entire world. In this argument, simchah through Torah study is not a communal experience, but a personal one. According to Rabbi Eleazar's statement, simchah is admirable, but it is not a universally

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[7] Anderson, Gary A. *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 125

[8] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 123

appropriate reason for Torah study. One may begin to study Torah as an individual concerned with his own internal state, but one may not end there. Torah study has the potential to affect the cosmos, which is the ultimate reason that Jews should engage in it.

For the rabbis, Torah study was an everyday occurrence, as was the simchah of Torah study. This does not mean that all Torah study constituted simchah, but it does mean that it was possible to engage in simchah through Torah study on a regular basis. The rabbis did not only engage in Torah study in order to fulfill the commandment to rejoice on a festival, but they did so in order to learn about God's will and engage in simchah on a regular basis. Indeed, Torah study was accessible to the rabbis and they saw it as accessible to common Jews who cared to be learned. This meant that the joy of Torah study was also accessible and achievable by many the people most of the time. Presence in the house of study was seen by the rabbis as a praiseworthy act, and they assured joy to the Jew who spent his time studying. In this vein, we read, "By a person's presence in a synagogue or a house of study, joy is renewed for him every single day."[9] The rabbis democratize simchah in their discussions concerning the simchah of Torah. Torah is something "in which all Jews rejoice" and in which they all can find great meaning.[10] God is accessible to all who study Torah and God's will can be understood by those who study Torah. This is why the rabbis see Torah as something in which to rejoice. Whether or not the Torah was as accessible to Jews as the rabbis imagined is not clear. The reality may have been that the average Jew did not have access to scripture and may not have had the ability to study it in its original Hebrew, but the rabbis nonetheless present a world in which Torah and the joy that accompanies it are, in

[9] Tanna de-be Eliyahu, Eliyahu Rabbah, Ch. 18. The dating of this text is a matter of great debate and disagreement. Scholar date it anywhere from the third to the tenth century. Elbaum, Jacob. "Tanna De-Vei Eliyahu". *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

[10] p. Berachot 9:5

principle, within the grasp of every Jew.

Rabbinic texts, both from the Tannaitic and Amoraic times, serve as the foundation for finding simchah in Torah study. Later Jewish texts also present Torah study as a form of simchah. In a 14th century commentary to Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, Rabbi Vidal Yom Tov of Tolosa argued that "the study of Torah and Wisdom is the true joy."[11] The Zohar and later medieval texts speak of the joy of Torah, but tend to speak more of the simchah of living a life of Torah and fulfilling the commandments of the Torah. They tend to equate the joy of Torah with *simchah shel mitzvah*, the joy of performing the commandments, a trope we will turn to below.

Simchah in Prayer and Worship

In addition to Torah study, the rabbis also present prayer in various forms as a substitute for sacrifice. Sacrifice, in the biblical world, was the primary vehicle by which the Israelites worshipped God. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 C.E., Jews were no longer able to worship in this way. The rabbis then placed greater importance on other forms of worship, some of which existed in biblical times and some of which came about later in Jewish history. Discussions concerning liturgy and the laws surrounding prayer fill the Mishnah, Talmud, and other rabbinic texts. In addition to creating and setting liturgy, the rabbis also spoke about the meaning of prayer in its various forms. One such meaning of which they spoke was simchah. In order to better understand the joy of worship about which the rabbis spoke, we must first explore the ways in which the Hebrew Bible spoke about simchah and worship.

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[11] Fishbane, p. 159

Simchah and Worship in the Hebrew Bible

We have already encountered Psalms 100, which calls on the reader to "Worship the LORD in joy."[12] This sentiment is expressed throughout the book of Psalms. Knowledge of God leads the psalmist to joyful worship. The word "simchah" appears in Psalms 42/43 and Psalms 100 in reference to worshipping at the Temple in Jerusalem. While the psalmist in Psalms 42/43 can only hope to experience the joy of being in God's presence, the psalmist in Psalms 100 appears to be basking joyfully in God's presence. In both cases, joy leads to action in the form of praise and sacrifice. It is not clear, though, whether Psalms 100:2 is descriptive or prescriptive. The psalmist could be calling for worshippers to come before God only once they have attained a joyous state, or he could be telling them to worship God in order to experience the joy of doing so. Anderson understands this as a "call to communal praise," meaning that it is calling upon the community to engage in a specific behavior that constitutes simchah.[13] If we were to take Muffs' understanding of the term "simchah", though, we would interpret this verse as referring to the willful internal state in which the worshipper offers the prayer. In either case, simchah is much more than an internal emotion, and crosses over to the public realm of behavior. In this way, joy is both an emotion and an action that the worshipper can have and express. The psalmist accesses the worship of God through jubilation and thanksgiving.[14] The joy of worship also springs from the knowledge of God's loyalty and faithfulness.[15]

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[12] v. 2

[13] Anderson, p. 43

[14] Kraus, Hans-Joachim. *Pslams 1-59: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1988. p. 275

[15] Schaefer, Konrad. *Studies in Hebrew and Narrative Poetry: Psalms*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 2001. p. 247

At the end of the book of Deuteronomy, the Israelites hear a litany of curses that are to befall them if they do not obey God and the commandments God has laid out for them. In addition to this rationale, we read, "Because you would not serve the LORD your God in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything."[16] According to this explanation, neglecting to worship and serve God joyfully is a reason for the Israelite community to receive divine punishment. If this is the case, then the exhortation found in Psalms 100:2 holds great weight and is more than a light-hearted request. Joyful worship, whether through sacrifice or some other means, ensures the Israelites' security and continued blessing.

The book of Psalms presents nature worshipping and praising God joyfully. "Let the earth exult, the many islands rejoice!"[17], and "Zion, hearing it, rejoices, the towns of Judah exult,"[18] serve as models for joyful human worship: "O you righteous, rejoice in the LORD and acclaim His holy name!"[19] Here, we see joyful praise and worship of God not as sacrifice, but as something different. In this text, "rejoice" parallels "exult". Another psalm in which nature rejoices, Psalms 96, allows the reader to understand even more parallels to simchah in worship. In this text, we see a connection between simchah, "thunder"[20], and "shout for joy"[21]. The psalm begins with the call, "Sing to the LORD", which gives us an idea of what is meant by the words that follow. It seems that joy constitutes a series of actions or behaviors. Simchah is the act of worship, of which song is a part. This act may stem from an internal mood, but it clearly requires some sort of work outside of the self, which perhaps includes even making a loud noise.

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[16] Deuteronomy 28:47
[17] Psalms 97:1
[18] Ibid. v. 8
[19] Ibid. v. 12
[20] v. 11
[21] v.12

Simchah and Worship in Rabbinic Texts

Just as simchah and worship are linked in the biblical text, we find them mentioned together in rabbinic texts. In rabbinic texts, though, the category of worship was enlarged to include prayer, song, dance, and acting according to the commandments. It is here that we find the rabbis speaking of *simchah shel mitzvah*, the joy of serving God through the practice of commanded acts. This term appears in several texts, always contrasted with behaviors and states of being that are not improper for serving and worshipping God, such as sadness, laziness, light-headedness, laughter, frivolous conversation, and wasting time.[22]

We get a picture of what the rabbis believed constituted proper joyous worship in the continuation of the description of *Bet HaSho'evah*, which the rabbis present as the epitome of simchah. In this early rabbinic text, joyous worship is shown to include dancing, singing songs of praise, and playing various instruments.[23] These are outward displays of piety and joy. They include elements of joyous worship that are described in the biblical text, but this text adds to them and places them in a particular setting: the Temple in Jerusalem on the festival of Sukkot.

The role of song in sacrificial worship is dealt with in b. Arachin 11a. The rabbis here are debating a *mishnah* in which Rabbi Meir argues that a sacrifice is invalid without an accompanying song and the sages argue that it is valid.[24] In the course of this discussion, we find the following statement: "How do we know that the song (*shir*) is obligatory in the first place?" Rav Mattenah answers, "[It is derived] from here: Because you did not serve the

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[22] See b. Pesachim 117a, b. Berachot 31a
[23] m. Sukkah 5:2
[24] m. Arachin 2:4

Lord your God with joy and gladness of heart [Deuteronomy 28:47].' Now what service is it that is done with joy and gladness of heart? It must be said a song."[25] Anderson notes that the rabbis in this discussion are not speaking about just any type of song, but a very specific one – a song or poem of praise found in the book of Psalms.[26] It is clear from this discussion, though, that the rabbis believed song, or poetry, to be a form of worship, and a joyful one at that. The act of singing is so important that some argue that the absence of such a joyful behavior would invalidate an otherwise valid sacrifice. It is noteworthy that rabbis here place great importance on song as joyous worship. This and other talmudic discussions[27] show the connection between the feeling of simchah and "its outward manifestation in a song of praise."[28] In this way, the rabbis speak of the specific behavior of songful worship as constituting engagement in simchah.

Despite these discussions about simchah through song and prayer, rabbinic texts focus less on the simchah of worship through song and dance, and focus more on joyous service to God through legislated acts, or *mitzvot*. The spontaneous emotional outpourings of joy found in the book of Psalms are in rabbinic texts replaced by fixed prayer and commanded acts. They pay close attention to biblical texts that question the benefit of joy, such as Ecclesiastes 2:2, which asks, "Of joy, 'What good is that?'". The rabbis read this verse, and comment that there are different types of simchah, some of which are acceptable and some of which are not. This distinction comes

> "to teach you that the *Shechinah* does not dwell amidst sadness, or laziness, or folly, or lightheadedness, or [idle]

[25] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 44
[26] p. 44
[27] b. Berachot 7b
[28] Anderson, p. 45

> conversation, or worthless matters – but [rather dwells] amidst a joyous matter [connected to the] performance of a commandment."[29]

This text connects joy to commanded behavior, but also contrasts it with undesirable emotions and behaviors. Simchah, then, is broken into two parts. One is merriment that is not commanded and is not praiseworthy, and one is the joy one experiences and displays through the practice of *mitzvot*. This is a distinction that the rabbis find a basis for in the Hebrew Bible, and one that will continue to exist throughout the history of Jewish literature. This is a tension that existed between the rabbinical views of religious life and the lived religious life of the Jews who may have been their audience. The positive quality of joy seems to include both emotion and behavior,[30] though the balance between these will be discussed in later texts.

It is particularly when the rabbis speak about *simchah shel mitzvah* that we see the connection between simchah and volition. In speaking about doing commandments joyfully, the rabbis acknowledge the possibility of performing commandments in a state other than joy. It is better to do them with simchah, to do them because of a desire to do God's will, without being forced to do so. The phrase *simchah shel mitzvah* refers not to the emotion generated by performing the commandment, but means the "joyful and spontaneous willingness with which one performs a commandment."[31] In this way, we see that the rabbis valued serving and worshipping God willingly, and placed willful service above other forms of service. The rabbis also use this term to differentiate proper forms of divine service and

[29] b. Shabbat 30b, translation taken from Fishbane, p. 155

[30] Fishbane, p. 155

[31] Muffs, Yochanan. *Love & Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel.* New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992. p. 178

Jewish action from those that they found unsatisfactory. The distinction exists not because the act itself is different, but because the mood or particular way in which the act is performed is different. The presence of simchah within an act of divine service makes the act more acceptable and more praiseworthy. The rabbis therefore make joy into something they can legislate, simchah becomes a legal obligation linked to other legal obligations.[32] Additionally, the rabbis connect their concept of *mitzvah* to the accepted biblical requirement for volitional and joyful divine service.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel notes that there are *mitzvot* that Israel received in joy, which include circumcision. These *mitzvot*, he notes, are still practiced with simchah, joyfully and willingly.[33] It is the *mitzvot* that the Israelites took on with simchah that Jews keep easily and that stay with the people. Prayer is one *mitzvah* that the rabbis believed should be done with simchah, and beyond that, should be done "while still rejoicing in the performance of some commandment."[34] Here, we see the rabbis linking worship to *simchah shel mitzvah*, and also alluding to the belief that *simchah shel mitzvah* is a state of being that emerges from commanded behavior and remains with an individual after the act is finished.

Simchah and Worship in Post-Rabbinic Texts

The association of joy, worship, and service is continued in many post-rabbinic texts. Maimonides and other medieval Jewish religious thinkers had much to say on this topic. After speaking about *simchat Bet HaSho'evah* and the types of joyous worship that occurred there, Maimonides states, "The joy which a person expresses in doing a *mitzvah*, and in the

[32] Anderson, p. 14

[33] b. Shabbat 130a

[34] b. Berachot 31a. Translation taken from Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being*. Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2003. p. 137

love of God that He commanded through them, is a great act of worship. And whoever restrains himself from this joy is deserving of punishment from God, as it is said: '[You will be punished] because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy and gladness'".[35] Maimonides connects *simchah shel mitzvah* with worship, and does so using the core text of Deuteronomy 28:47. This core biblical text is likely referring to the lack of joyous sacrificial worship, but Maimonides here interprets it in another way. Thus, even though the Temple has not existed for hundreds of years by the time of his writing, Maimonides makes this text relevant to all Jews in his time and beyond. In doing so, he allows for the possibility of joyous worship to exist in the performance of acts other than worship. In addition to the obvious performative elements that constitute Maimonides' views on simchah, there does also seem to be a need to proper mood or internal emotion in order for a person to engage in simchah.

The Zohar takes up this discussion, highlighting the importance of performing *mitzvot* joyfully. In this text, the authors acknowledge the difficulty of joy, and speak of sadness as a real and present state of being. Sadness cannot be rejected as "incompatible with spiritual life", so the Zohar looks to find a legitimate place for it, which is in penitence and repentance.[36] This recognition complicates prior beliefs, but it does not negate them. This text still sees joyful service and worship as important, and believes that joy can overpower sadness. It argues that when the Temple existed, the priests and Levites would be joyful for the worshipper, but then the text explores how to worship joyfully now that there are no sacrifices and no one to be joyful for you when you cannot be. It comes to the conclusion

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[35] *Hilkhot Lulav*, ch. 8, hal. 15. Translation taken from Fishbane, p. 158

[36] Fishbane, pp. 160-161

that one must bring oneself in prayer, study, and silent devotionals as a "joyous offering" to God.[37] The Zohar introduces the idea that the worshipper must pray with mystical intention in order to fulfill the commandment of worshipping God in joy.[38] In doing so, the authors show simchah to be an act that occurs in this world, but can have an impact in the spiritual realm. The need to have intention in joyful worship and service is an idea that will emerge again in Chasidism and throughout Jewish thought. It goes beyond the need to perform a set of behaviors that constitute joy, and calls for a serious internal state of being that is perhaps difficult for the common person to attain.

Rabbi Elijah de Vidas, a student of Cordovero[39], engages in a comprehensive discussion of simchah in his work, Reshit Chochmah. He examines the power behind joyfully performing the commandments, studying the Torah, and praying in the synagogue. When done with the right mystical intention these behaviors affect the divine realm, which then benefits the worshipper. He believes that seemingly small, insignificant acts in this world actually have significance that radiates out beyond the self and beyond this world.

According to de Vidas, another form of joyful worship is that of *hitbodedut*, or isolation and meditation. He equates Torah with song, showing that the simchah of Torah can come about through singing praises to God.[40] While joy through song originates in the biblical text, de Vidas' innovation is the mystical element, which gives new meaning to song and also allows for joy to emerge in silent contemplation. In this mystical work, we see the author referencing joy as a state of being that can be achieved by performing various

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[37] Ibid. p. 161
[38] Ibid. pp. 162-163
[39] Moses ben Jacob Cordovero was a kabbalist in Safed who lived from 1522-1570. He was also the teacher of Isaac Luria. Ben-Shlomo, Joseph. "Cordovero, Moses ben Jacob". *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*
[40] Ibid. pp. 163-166

behaviors, some of which are traditional, and some of which are new. The acts themselves only reach their true potential to affect God when they are done with joyful intention. It is therefore not the act itself that is of ultimate importance, but the intention behind the act. This is a mystical intention, not to be confused with the willful intention that Muffs describes when analyzing biblical and classical rabbinic texts.

It is only when Chasidism emerges, though, that we see simchah being spoken of as separate from religious duty. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav at times speaks of joy without meaning *simchah shel mitzvah*. He was concerned with joy as a way to overpower sadness and banish it. He believed one needed to bring joy into his life especially when he was sad, and he could do this through certain behaviors. In this case, Rabbi Nachman sees simchah as an internal state of being that is achieved through action, but simchah is not the action itself. Rabbis Nachman believes that "the essence of joy arises through the commandments,"[41] but he also presents the idea that non-halakhic dance is a way to bring simchah into one's life.[42] This is not a commanded act, but it still has great religious meaning. He goes so far as to say, "When I speak of the need for joy, I don't mean *simchah shel mitzvah*...I only mean no sadness. Put plainly: a Jew who does not rejoice in his being a Jew is an ingrate before God."[43] Simchah, for Rabbi Nachman may have at times involved commanded action, but here he speaks of joy purely as an emotion that is unrelated to the *mitzvot*. This does not mean joy is unrelated to the service of God. Indeed, the reason he strove to be joyful was so that he could worship God as he saw fit. In this light, we find his statement, "Pray with joy,

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[41] *Likute 'Etzot*, s.v. Simchah, 32
[42] Fishbane. pp. 169-170
[43] Translation taken from Fishbane, p. 172

and watch your requests ascend straight to God's chamber."[44] It is possible to see this as an innovation, but it is also possible to see this as a return to the calls for spontaneous joyful worship found in the book of Psalms.

Joyful, ecstatic, enthusiastic worship would become the hallmark of Chasidism. This movement sought to worship God joyfully through song and dance, "Prayer for the [C]hasid is ecstatic and loud, involving song, body movements, shaking, and clapping."[45] As Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav wrote,

> Joy is a total structure, comprised of 248 limbs and 365 arteries, and therefore when one rejoices or dances, he must be certain that he activates the entirety of joy, from head to heel; for sometimes joy is only in the feet, or only in the heart, or only in the head, as alluded to by the verse, "and eternal joy on their head" [Isaiah 35:10]. But the essence of joy is that one activate the entirety of joy...and for that one needs many *mitzvot*..."[46]

Rabbi Nachman is here speaking of embodied joy and *mitzvah*, which means that every part of the body is ideal for performing one *mitzvah* or another. For example, one activates joy through the hands by giving gifts or taking a *lulav* and *etrog*, through the mouth by uttering prayer and honest speech, and through the legs and feet by walking on Shabbat or dancing before the bride and groom.[47] Even though *mitzvot* were are part of Chasidic joy and life, it

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[44] Mykoff, Moshe. *The Empty Chair: Finding Hope and Joy, Timeless Wisdom from a Hasidic Master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov.* Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994. p. 84

[45] Rubinstein, Avraham. "Hasidism", *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

[46] *Likute Moharan*, I, 178. Translation taken from Fishbane, p. 181

[47] Fishbane, p. 181

was this type of worship, among other aspects of Chasidism, that caused the Mitnagdim, including the Gaon of Vilna, to look down at the movement as delusional, dangerous, and idolatrous.[48]

As a continuation of rabbinic Judaism, Musar literature also deals with *simchah shel mitzvah* and simchah in worship. In Orchot Tzadikim, we find the statement: "let a man place all his joy in the Torah, and when he performs *mitzvot* let him rejoice in his heart for having merited to be a servant to the Exalted King, to whom the celestial beings bow."[49] The author of this text believes that simchah is a state in which one should behave ethically and according to the commandments. He speaks of simchah not as volition, but as an inner state that results from one's ability to serve God and receive reward for doing so. The ability to serve God is a reason to be in a joyful state. In fact, *mitzvot* done in this state are much more acceptable and much more valuable than those performed without joy. The author bases this on Psalms 119:162 saying, "'I rejoice in your words as one who finds much spoil.' And one who performs *mitzvot* with joy receives a thousand times more reward than one who finds the *mitzvot* burdensome."[50] One should therefore become joyful in order to do the commandments if he wishes to receive the best reward. This work also continues the tradition of seeing a connection between joyous worship and song, expounding, "Abraham and David...glorified and exalted the Holy One Blessed be He with songs and praises, lifting their voices with joy."[51] The biblical characters are models for the author's own joyous worship. In this text, a joyful state is important in order for the accompanying actions to be

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[48] Rubinstein, Avraham. "Hasidism", *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

[49] Zaloshinsky, Gavriel, ed. *The Ways of the Tzadikim - Sefer Orchot Tzadikim*. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1994. p. 207

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid. pp. 207-209

as effective as possible. Ethical Jewish action requires a correct and fitting mood, and it is when one engages in simchah that one is able to act according to God's will. This simchah comes from the knowledge that divine reward awaits the individual who acts ethically and according to the *mitzvot*.

These post-rabbinic views concerning simchah and worship all were greatly influenced by rabbinic Judaism and the connections the rabbis made between simchah, prayer, and *mitzvah*. These authors and religious leaders used biblical and rabbinic texts to inform their own worship practices. In doing so, they utilized rabbinic ideas and transformed them to make sense in their own time and place. As their understandings of joy and divine service developed, these authors found great meaning in rabbinic works and were still able to make them relevant to an evolving Judaism. Just as the rabbis based their ideas and practices on biblical texts, but reinterpreted them to fit their current reality, medieval commentators, mystics, and ethicists were able to base their innovations on rabbinic tradition. In doing so, we see various types of joyful worship arise throughout Jewish history.

Chapter 4

Simchah Through Wine, Food, and Other Material Goods

From the conversation concerning simchah through sacrifice, we have seen that simchah was at times achieved and expressed through consumption. The eating of sacrificial meat was a source of joy for those who lived while the sacrificial cult still existed. The rabbis spoke about the great joy that came about through eating cooked meat, and even said there was no joy to be had if they were not able to eat the cooked meat of a sacrifice. Despite these statements, rabbinical texts include discussions about simchah arising through the consumption of other things. In several rabbinic texts, we find conversations surrounding joy in relation to wine, non-sacrificial meat, other food, and various material goods. Even in biblical texts we find simchah connected to some of these earthly goods. Sometimes these goods were connected to sacrificial worship, but other times the connection was ambiguous or not there at all. This chapter will explore the ways in which the rabbis viewed joy as experienced and expressed through these various material goods. It will also examine how Jewish values concerning earthly goods may have sought to constrain rampant consumerism, gluttony, and drunkeness.

Simchah Through Wine in Biblical Texts

Wine and other types of drink were very present in biblical times. Wine was used in the Tabernacle and in the Temple as part of sacrificial worship. It was not, however, exclusively used in this setting. People in biblical times drank for the purpose of serving God, but also drank for their own enjoyment. An important and well-known biblical text that

speaks to this reality is Psalms 104:15, which states, "wine makes joyful the heart of man." This psalm speaks to the greatness of God as shown by God providing great abundance for both humans and animals. Abundant wine is something that humans desire, therefore its presence leads to the joy of knowing God's power. Joy through wine, in this text, is a vehicle by which humans encounter God's greatness. It is also possible, though, that when humans consume wine for purposes other than experiencing God's bounty, it can lead to improper expressions of joy, such as drunkenness, frivolity, and light-headedness.

According to the book of Judges, humans are not the only ones who rejoice through the consumption of wine. When the people proclaim Abimelech their king, Jotham tells a parable about the trees attempting to appoint a king. They go to several trees and plants, asking each to be the king, and each responds by saying that they still have work to do in order to fulfill their destiny of benefitting God and man. After the olive tree and the fig tree decline the offer we find the following: "So the trees said to the vine, 'You come to reign over us.' But the vine replied, 'Have I stopped yielding my new wine, which makes joyful God and men, that I should go and wave above the trees?'"[1] In this text, we see that wine was believed not only to be a source of joy for humans, but also for God. This is not surprising, as wine was used in sacrifice,[2] which we have shown to be connected to the joy of both humans and God. The joy of consuming wine and sacrificial meat together is clear in Deuteronomy 14:26, which states "And spend the money one anything you want – cattle, sheep, wine, or other strong intoxicant, or anything you may desire. And you shall feast there, in the presence of the LORD your God, and rejoice with your household." This text

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[1] Judges 9:12-13

[2] Exodus 29:40, Leviticus 23:13, Numbers 28:7

shows that the consumption of wine and material goods other than sacrificial meat fulfill the commandment to rejoice.

A lack of wine is presented in Isaiah as a lack of joy.

> "The new wine fails, the vine languishes; And all the joyful-hearted sigh. Still is the merriment of timbrels, Ended the clamor of revelers, Stilled the merriment of lyres. They drink their wine without song; Liquor tastes bitter to the drinker. Towns are broken, empty; Every house is shut, none enters; Even over wine, a cry goes up in the streets: The sun has set on all joy, The gladness of the earth is banished."[3]

Wine and joy are also here connected to music and song, which were shown above to bring joy and be vehicles through which the Israelites expressed their joy. The lack of wine in this text even relates to gladness leaving the earth, thus presenting the idea that wine is a symbol of joy not only for humans and God, but also for the earth.

Wine's joy inducing effects are presented in the book of Proverbs, which says, "Give strong drink to the hapless and wine to the embittered. Let them drink and forget their poverty, and put their troubles out of mind."[4] Wine is therefore a vehicle by which the poor can forget those things that are keeping them from experiencing joy and acquaint them with the joy of experiencing the bounty of God's created earth. However, the text cautions that wine is not appropriate for everyone, and that its effects can be detrimental for powerful and wealthy people. Thus, wine is an appropriate source of joy and symbol of joy for some, but

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[3] Isaiah 24:7-11

[4] Proverbs 31:6-7

not for all. Even according the Hebrew Bible, its use must be carefully monitored if proper joy is to arise from it. The potential for improper joy to arise from wine consumption is something that the Hebrew Bible acknowledged, and is indeed a topic of conversation in rabbinic texts.

Simchah Through Wine in Rabbinic Texts

Since wine is used so often in the biblical text to speak of joy, it is natural to expect to see wine used in the same way in rabbinic texts. In the Tosefta's discussion about the Pesach evening ritual, we find the following, "A man is commanded to make his children and wife rejoice on the feast day. With what does he make them rejoice? With wine, as it is written, 'and wine makes the human heart rejoice' [Psalms 104:15]. R. Yehudah says: 'Women with what is appropriate for them, and children with what is appropriate for them."[5] This text, like the text from Proverbs 31, acknowledges that wine brings some people joy, but not others. The primary responsibility of the man in the Tosefta is to make his family members rejoice, not to give them wine. Wine is seen by the rabbis as a vehicle through which many people rejoice, but the rabbis also open up the possibility for women and children to rejoice through other means. This does not exclude women and children from experiencing joy through drinking wine, but it also does not necessitate that they consume wine.

The talmudic discussion on this earlier text sees the connection of wine and joy as an innovation, and does not believe that wine was the primary vehicle by which one rejoiced in

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[5] t. Pesachim 10:3, Translation taken from Anderson, Gary A. *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. pp. 117-118

the time that the sacrificial cult was in existence. Wine only became a vehicle for experiencing joy after the destruction of the Second Temple.[6] Although the portion of this text that is relevant to this point occurs part of the way through the talmudic *sugya*, I quote the beginning of the *sugya* to show how Rabbi Yehudah b. Betira's quote is used, and also because the beginning of the *sugya* will be relevant to a later point.

> Our rabbis taught: A man is required to make his sons and slaves rejoice on the festival, for scripture says: "You shall rejoice on your festival." With what does he make them rejoice? With wine. R. Yehudah says: "Men with what is fit for them and women with what is fit for them. Men with what is fit for them – wine." Women? R. Yosef said: "In Babylon with colored garments, in Israel with ironed garments of flax."
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> It was taught: R. Yehudah b. Betira says: when the Temple existed, joy only derived from meat, as it is said: "You shall sacrifice *shelamim* and eat them there and rejoice before the Lord your God" [Deuteronomy 27:7]. But now seeing that the Temple no longer exists, joy derives only from wine. As it is written: "Wine makes joyful the heart of man" [Psalms 104:15].[7]

It is striking that even though this text refers to a biblical instance of wine and simchah together, it argues that wine and simchah were not connected until after the year 70 C.E.

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[6] Anderson, p. 118

[7] b. Pesachim 109a. Translation taken from Anderson, pp. 49, 118

This is a radical reinterpretation of the verse from Psalms 104, in which the simchah of wine consumption was acknowledged outside of the festival and sacrificial setting. For the rabbis, wine is therefore an acceptable vehicle by which one could engage in simchah, but it is not ideal.[8] It is also striking that even though this text is commenting on the Tosefta, which allows for women and children to rejoice with things other than wine, it states that wine is the only vehicle by which a person is able to (or perhaps allowed to) rejoice. It is true that the *baraita* by Rabbi Yehudah b. Betira, who lived around 90-130 C.E., may not have been referencing the statement from the Tosefta, but the talmudic discussion in which this *baraita* is quoted certainly is familiar with the text from the Tosefta and is responding to it. In this case, one would expect the Gemara to open up the possibility for joy to arise by means other than wine. Indeed, the Gemara presents other ways people may fulfill the commandment of rejoicing on the Pesach festival. These will be examined later in the chapter.

The beginning of the *sugya* presents wine as a source of simchah for men and as a way for men to express simchah. Rabbi Yehudah, however, does not say that wine is connected to simchah for women. By singling out wine as a fitting source of joy for men, he is either excluding it as a fitting source of joy for women, or he is admitting that he can only speak to that which is fitting for men, but not that which is fitting for women. The text states that a man should cause the women of his house to rejoice with that which is fitting for them, and Rabbi Yosef assumes that wine is not what brings women joy.

Another example of a rabbinic text in which wine is mentioned as an acceptable form of rejoicing on a festival is b. Pesachim 71a. In this text, the rabbis are debating how a common Jew can fulfill his obligation to rejoice on the festival when the festival falls on

[8] Anderson, p. 118

Shabbat and sacrificial meat cannot be prepared. Rabbi Papa concludes: "[The common Israelites] rejoice with clean clothes and old wine."[9] In his opinion, wine was a suitable substitute for a sacrifice and was connected so closely with simchah that its consumption fulfilled the commandment of rejoicing on a festival, even when the Temple was standing. The connection between simchah and clean clothing will be dealt with below.

Simchah Through Wine in Post-Rabbinic Texts

The connection between wine and simchah continued in post-rabbinic times, though in some cases with more nuance. A most interesting discussion occurs in Orchot Tzadikim, a Musar text. This text speaks out against the consumption of strong drink and the simchah associated with it. Biblical and talmudic texts had similar reservations concerning wine consumption, but the author here holds an even stronger position concerning improper venues for wine consumption. Rather than speaking about moderation, as the rabbis did, this author speaks about avoiding wine altogether. He argues that wine is to be avoided because it "beclouds all of the *mitzvot* and causes fear of *Hashem* to depart from the hearts of men."[10] Even though the rabbis spoke about the joy of wine consumption as fulfilling a commandment, the author here argues that on a festival

> "one should not indulge himself in drinking wine, frivolity, or lightheadedness, as it is written "Because you did not serve *Hashem* your God in joy and gladness of heart" [Deuteronomy 28:47], the implication being that we have been commanded to

[9] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 48

[10] Zaloshinsky, Gavriel, ed. *The Ways of the Tzadikim - Sefer Orchot Tzadikim*. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1994. pp. 171-173

> attain only that joy which is conducive to the service of the Creator of All, and it is impossible to serve the Blessed One out of lightheadedness, laughter, or drunkenness.

From these excerpts, it would seem that this late medieval text is going against the rabbinic decisions concerning wine.

However, the author also has some positive things to say about using wine to become joyful in the right situations and amounts. He quotes from biblical texts mentioned above, Proverbs 31, Judges 9, and Psalms 104, to prove that "drinking wine...is very good when it is done properly in the manner of the wise." He continues, arguing that one should use wine as a cure to drive away sorrow and "strengthen himself in Torah by learning it with joy, for when one is steeped in sorrow, he cannot learn."[11] Here, we see the author acknowledging that wine and ethical simchah can exist together. In recognizing this, he stays within the rabbinic tradition, but adds some subtlety to it. In doing so, he makes sure to connect wine and simchah to Torah study. Any type of joy through wine that does not allow for one to study Torah and serve God is unacceptable, but that does not mean that all joy through wine is unacceptable; some can still be in the service of God and can be done ethically. Drinking wine must be done very carefully so as to make the individual more able to perform the *mitzvot*, not less able. Both possibilities exist when one rejoices with wine. This idea exists in biblical and rabbinic texts, but is brought forth here in a new and fascinating way.

Simchah Through Food and Other Materials in Biblical Texts

The Hebrew Bible speaks about rejoicing through the consumption of food and the

[11] Ibid. pp. 173-175

use of other material goods, sometimes in the same verse. While many of the references to simchah and food in biblical texts refer to eating sacrificial feasts, other texts speak more generally about eating. Food was relatively scarce in biblical times and famine was a real danger and fear. A lack of food was seen to be a form of divine punishment,[12] just as an abundance of food was believed to be a form of divine reward. It is to be expected, then that biblical texts would associate the availability and consumption of food with simchah and with God. There are also times when food and other material goods are mentioned along with wine in order to speak about the joys of everyday earthly pleasures. In this vein, we find two pieces from Ecclesiastes:

> 8:15 "I therefore praised enjoyment. For the only good a man can have under the sun is to eat and drink and enjoy oneself. That much can accompany him, in exchange for his wealth, through the days of life that God has granted him under the sun."
>
> 9:7-8 "Go, eat your bread in joy, and drink your wine in gladness; for your action was long ago approved by God. Let your clothes always be freshly washed, and your head never lack ointment."

Here, two material goods other than food and drink are introduced: clothing and ointment/oil. These two objects will appear throughout rabbinic literature as sources of simchah and as appropriate vehicles through which one may express simchah. In two biblical instances,

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[12] Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses*. New York: Schocken Books, 1995. p. 196

though, oil is connected with *sason* rather than with simchah.[13] Both terms may be translated as "joy", yet the difference in terminology should be noted.

In the sections from Ecclesiastes, enjoying worldly pleasures is an appropriate behavior. In the context of the chapters in which these verses are found, though, it does not seem that the author himself is rejoicing. He is lamenting the difficulties he finds in the world, and comes to the conclusion that one should rejoice in these earthly things while he still has access to them, which will not be forever. These earthly, hedonistic things are fleeting, and should be taken advantage of as long as possible. They may not bring to a person a sense of ultimate meaning, but they serve as a consolation for a difficult life. The author does not speak of fulfilling commandments by rejoicing in these material pleasures, but rather believes that since there seems to be little justice in the world, one should go about his life rejoicing however he pleases.

There are texts, however, that speak more positively about rejoicing in the consumption of material goods. We find a link between simchah and the abundance of food and drink in Psalms 4:8, which reads, "You put joy into my heart when their grain and wine show increase." In this text, simchah is an inner emotion that the psalmist feels upon seeing the flourishing goods of others. This simchah does not require an external action, but does warrant praising God, who is perceived to be the source of this abundance and the cause for this joy.

The joy of oil is not always mentioned along with food or wine, as we see in Proverbs 27:9, "Oil and incense make joyful the heart, And the sweetness of a friend is better than one's own counsel." In this case, oil is connected to another earthly joy: the smell of incense.

[13] Isaiah 61:3, Psalms 45:8

Incense and oil were both used in the act of sacrifice, but this verse does not seem to be speaking about joy through sacrifice. It seems to be speaking more generally about the use of oil and incense as things that bring a person pleasure and cause them to rejoice wherever they are. Indeed, many of the material goods that are connected to simchah in the Hebrew Bible were also used in the Temple. This does not mean, however, that these goods are always connected with the Temple. These are also goods that were used and consumed in daily life. It is interesting that the things used in sacrifice were also things people enjoyed outside of the sacrificial setting. The Temple, then, was a place where people could worship God and acknowledge God as the provider of that which they enjoyed day after day. The people did not need the Temple, though, in order to enjoy these material goods. They could enjoy them in their everyday lives, even if they were far away from the Temple. It is not surprising, then, that these material goods would continue to be symbols for joy and sources for joy after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. Engaging in simchah through using these items was a way to enjoy what were viewed as divine gifts. They also fulfilled certain human needs and made life more pleasurable. In this way, engaging in simchah through the consumption of earthly goods certainly necessitated particular behaviors, but also had strong emotional components.

Simchah Through Food and Other Materials in Rabbinic Texts

By the Tannaitic period, "drinking wine, wearing special garments, and even preparing a non-sacrificial meal" were activities included in the expanded definition of the commandment "to rejoice".[14] We see, though, that the rabbis did not universally accept this

[14] Tirosh-Samuelson, Hava. *Happiness in Premodern Judaism: Virtue, Knowledge, and Well-Being*. Cincinnati:

expanded definition. The question of whether feasting outside of Jerusalem on a festival fulfills the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on the festival arises in b. Betzah 15b. The discussion begins with a story of Rabbi Eliezer teaching his students Torah on a festival. Students begin to leave, at which time Rabbi Eliezer looks up at those remaining and informs them that those who have left "have dismissed eternal life to busy themselves in the affairs of the moment." When he finishes teaching and all students were leaving, he gives them his blessing, saying, "Go eat rich portions, drink sweet things, send portions to those who have none, because the days is holy to our Lord. Don't be sorrowful because the 'gladness of the Lord is your strength.'"[15][16] At this point, the redactor comes in to ask about Rabbi Eliezer's comments that his students should not have left to celebrate the festival.

> But is it not the case that the joy of the feast day is a commandment?! R. Eliezer, though, is consistent in his argument, for he has said: "The joy of the feast day is a permitted thing." For it has been taught: R. Eliezer says: "A man has nothing else to do on a feast day except eat and drink or sit and study."...R. Eliezer has this opinion: Either all of it is for the Lord or all of it for you. R. Yehoshua has this opinion: Divide it up! Half for the Lord and half for you![17]

At issue in this text is whether or not engaging in earthly pleasures constitutes true, commanded rejoicing on a festival. At first, Rabbi Eliezer seems to think Torah study fulfills this commandment, and feasting outside of the Temple does not. He does, however, allow

Hebrew Union College Press, 2003. p. 137

[15] Nehemiah 8:10

[16] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 119

[17] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 119

his students to leave at the end of his lesson in order to go feast with gladness, as these are permitted activities.

The question asked by the redactor subtly "transforms our understanding of the commandment to rejoice."[18] This question makes the presence of the Temple immaterial, asking whether feasting somewhere other than Jerusalem is a *mitzvah* or a *reshut*, that is, whether it is commanded or simply allowed.[19] If it is commanded, then it has the same force as other commandments, including Torah study. In this case, Rabbi Eliezer should not have cursed his students for going to engage in the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on a festival. If it is not commanded, then commandments such as Torah study and rejoicing on the festival in other ways take precedence over feasting in a non-sacrificial setting. If this is the case, then Rabbi Eliezer was correct to curse his students for neglecting to fulfill the *mitzvah* of rejoicing on the festival.

Anderson argues that the wording of the redactor's question is very significant. The redactor rephrases the biblical commandment "to rejoice before the Lord" as "joy of the feast day". In making this change, and not necessitating the rejoicing to occur *before* God, the redactor is eliminating the necessity that rejoicing take place at the Temple. The rabbinic text leaves out any reference to a particular space, thus allowing for the possibility for joyous feasting to occur in places other than Jerusalem.[20] In this way, the rabbinic text opens up the possibility for rejoicing through the consumption of food and drink in a non-sacrificial setting. One central aspect of the rabbinic project is to transfer Jewish practice away from the Temple. The rabbis were responding to a new reality, a reality in which there was no

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[18] Anderson, p. 120
[19] Ibid
[20] p. 122

Temple at which to worship and fulfill biblically ordained commandments. In this text, we see the transfer of focus from the Temple to other areas of Jewish life taking place carefully, yet definitively.

This text presents eating and drinking as being a joyous act for humans to engage in, but not for God. It presumes that dividing up the day between "the Lord" and "you" means diving up the day between Torah study and feasting. Unlike other forms of joy we have examined, the acts of eating and drinking only bring joy to humans. It is not clear from this text whether simchah is an internal feeling or solely an external behavior. It is clear that fulfilling the *mitzvah* of simchah requires certain types of behavior, but one cannot be sure whether it also requires a certain mood.

The texts from b. Pesachim 71a, and b. Pesachim 109a, quoted above, present the possibility for rejoicing through wearing various types of clothing. The first text presents the wearing of clean clothing as a way to express and achieve joy for the common Israelites, whereas the second text presents clothing as a way for women to rejoice. Both texts present clothing as fulfilling the commandment to rejoice for a section of the Israelite population, but not for the entire people. Both texts, then, present the possibility that different people find joy and express joy in different ways. Clothing is not a universal expression or source of joy, it is particular.

B. Peaschim 109a even acknowledges that geography and surrounding culture may play a part in what people enjoy. It says, "Women? R. Yosef said: 'In Babylon with colored garments, in Israel with ironed garments of flax.'" It seems, from Rabbi Yosef's statement, that the type of clothing that brings joy to a woman differs depending on where the woman

lives. While it might seem presumptuous of Rabbi Yosef to assume what brings a woman joy, he allows for some subjectivity. His statement shows that the rabbis believed that men and women enjoyed different things, and goes further to show that the rabbis believed that not all women were alike. His statement acknowledges that cultural factors shape how people engage in simchah, though not on an individual basis. This text indeed makes general statements about groups of women in Israel and in Babylon, and in doing so allows for the possibility that not all groups of people engage in simchah in the same ways. It also shows a belief that a man must know what the women of his house enjoy in order to help them fulfill the commandment to rejoice. It is clear from this text that clothing, among other things, was believed by the rabbis to be a fitting and appropriate vehicle through which one could rejoice and fulfill the commandment to do so.

Simchah Through Food and Other Materials in Post-Rabbinic Texts

Just as the Musar text, Orchot Tzadikim, took a nuanced view of the relationship between simchah and drinking wine, it also presents interesting beliefs about the ethical ways in which to achieve simchah through food, clothing, and other earthly goods. We see the author speaking both in favor of consuming these goods, and also cautioning the reader not to do so to excess.

> One must also rejoice on Sabbaths and Festivals and on Purim, for all these are reminders of the Exodus from Egypt and of the miracles that the Holy One blessed be He wrought for His chosen ones. Therefore, one should rejoice in his heart when

> he remembers God's lovingkindness and His great goodness toward those who do His will. And because of this we make delicacies and wear costly garments and drink wine – to rejoice the heart. But one must take care not to devote that joy to vanities, but to the love of the Blessed One...Who commanded that we have pleasure and joy on that day.[21]

Here, the author presents the simchah that arises from consuming material goods as an inner emotion. This emotion can be both beneficial and detrimental. If this joy is directed to God, then it is beneficial and is appropriate on holidays. Engaging in this behavior and feeling the joy of doing so even fulfills the commandment of rejoicing on the special day. If, however, this joy is directed elsewhere, then it is inappropriate. He presents the material goods as having the potential to remind the consumer of God's power and goodness. In this case, it is not the consumption of object itself that is commanded or prohibited, but the way in which is it consumed. The author here is concerned chiefly with the intention and the mood of the consumer.

Joy can come from worldly goods, but the author allows for a person to be joyful even if he lacks these. He argues, "one who rejoices in his lot is rich [m. Avot 4:1], even though he may be poor, for he rejoices in Hashem, who is his portion and his inheritance... 'Let all who seek the LORD rejoice.' [Psalms 105:3]."[22] He uses both biblical and rabbinic texts to show that one need not be wealthy or have many material goods in order to rejoice. The abundant food or clothing is not necessary for rejoicing to take place, but an abundance

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[21] Translation taken from Zaloshinsky, p. 215

[22] p. 207

of these things has the possibility both to lead to and away from joy.

Early rabbinic texts, and the later Jewish texts that followed in their wake continue the biblical tradition of seeing the possibility for simchah to emerge through the consumption of earthly goods. These goods are at times acceptable ways by which Jews can engage in simchah and serve God. Enjoyment in these items connects the Jew to the God of creation. Since God created the world, it is important for the rabbis to stress the possibility for joy to come out of the pleasures of the created world. These vehicle for simchah include external performative elements based in the physical world, but also include strong internal elements of pleasure and proper intention. Enjoying those things that God's created world provides is a way to connect to God and also to fulfill God's commandment to rejoice. Rather than being a distraction from serving God and doing God's commandments, eating, drinking, and using other material goods are acts that sustain life and bring one closer to God. Although Jewish texts do caution against excessive consumerism leading to improper joy, Judaism is not an ascetic religion; it is a religion that believes that God wants its adherents to enjoy life through earthly means. This is evidenced by the institution of blessings, or *berachot*, that Jews are to say upon consuming material goods such as food and wine. Engaging is simchah through consuming earthly goods is only acceptable when it leads to ethical action and to an enhanced relationship with God. The Temple was a place where people ate and drank joyfully, and the rabbis allow for this to occur outside of the Temple as well. In doing so, they show that it is possible to rejoice wherever and whenever one is. In showing the reader that there is joy to be had in consuming material goods, the rabbis show the reader that the possibility for simchah is in their hands. They have everything they need in order to connect

to God and rejoice in that which God has provided for them.

Chapter 5

Simchah Through Caring Relationship

Simchah Between a Man and a Woman Biblical Texts

Connections between simchah and loving relationships abound in the Hebrew Bible. For the most part, when speaking about the simchah of being in relationship with another individual, the Hebrew Bible references the relationship between a husband and a wife. The simchah between a husband and wife includes sexual joy, which is surely implied in several places in the Hebrew Bible. Our study of the Hebrew text can be informed by looking at an ancient Akkadian idiom, *ulsa epesu*. This phrase literally means "to do a joy", but can be translated in a more figurative manner as "to make love".[1] In the Ancient Near East, joy was sometimes used as a euphemism meaning sexual relations. This is surely the case in several biblical texts, but there may also be other ways to interpret this term when we find it speaking about a loving relationship between a man and a woman. As we will see, the simchah between a husband and a wife also includes more general joyful elements of the relationship.

Deuteronomy 24:5 commands, "When a man has taken a bride, he shall not go out with the army or be assigned to it for any purpose; he shall be exempt one year for the sake of his household, to give joy to the woman he has married." It is not clear from this text what giving joy to a wife entails. It is clear, though, that a man must be close to his wife, if not with her, in order to give her joy. He is not allowed to go out with the army because his wife is entitled to at least a year of joy with him. This may mean engaging in sexual relations with

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[1] Anderson, Gary A. *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 27

her new husband, but may also mean enjoying the presence of her husband, receiving a child from her husband, or receiving monetary and material benefit from a husband who is working and earning money. If he went out with the army, he might not be able to do any one of these things for his wife and household. Modern commentators such as Bernard Levinson[2] and Everett Fox[3] believe this refers, at least in part, to sexual joy. The biblical text in not explicit, though, meaning that the activities that lead to joy between a husband and a wife remain ambiguous.

In Song of Songs 1:4, though, we see that joy between and man and a woman necessitates some semblance of privacy. It reads, "Draw me after you, let us run! The king has brought me to his chambers. Let us delight and rejoice in your love, Savoring it more than wine – Like new wine they love you!" Here, rejoicing in love takes place only after the king brings the speaker to his chambers. This indicates that physical intimacy, if not sexual intercourse, is a form of simchah. This text also points to the idea that the simchah that occurs between a man and a woman in private can be better than the simchah that arises through the consumption of wine. The joy of wine and the joy between a man and a woman are here both connected seamlessly to love. Joy therefore arises out of a physical activity, but is also a product of an internal emotion. It is quite interesting that this text speaks about the joy of physical intimacy and does so from a feminine perspective. This text shows that women have the potential to rejoice through sex and also through drinking wine. These are not only acts that bring joy to men.

The love and simchah between a man and a woman is also presented together in

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[2] Levinson, Bernard. "Deuteronomy". *The Jewish Study Bible.* ed. Adele Berlin et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. p. 421

[3] Fox, Everett. *The Five Books of Moses.* New York: Schocken Books, 1995. p. 960

Proverbs 5:18-19. This text instructs the reader, "Let your fountain be blessed; Find joy in the wife of your youth – A loving doe, a graceful mountain goat. Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be infatuated with love of her always." In this case, a young woman's physical beauty is cause for a man to rejoice, especially when he has access to her. The text does not speak explicitly about sex, but alludes to it in referencing the joy that occurs in being satisfied by the woman's breasts. Just as in the verse from Song of Songs, this text presents rejoicing in love as having an intoxicating, or infatuating effect. The joy from arises from love is overwhelmingly emotive, and takes over one's entire being.

The joy of a husband and wife together is a recurring theme in the book of Jeremiah, and the prophet uses the phrase "the sound of mirth and joy, the voice of bridegroom and bride" as a prime example of things being good for the Israelite people. This phrase appears as a threat against the Israelites, and also as a call for consolation. One prophetic statement threatens, "And I will silence in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem the sound of mirth and joy, the voice of bridegroom and bride. For the land shall fall to ruin."[4] This threat is related to God's instruction to the prophet not to marry or have children. The sword and famine that is to plague the land and the people will not allow children to survive or live good lives. The prophet thus decides not to marry and not to engage in the joy of reproduction that goes along with marriage.[5]

The prophet uses the same phrase to give the people hope, and to inform them that their relationship with God still exists and can flourish. The text reads,

"Thus said the LORD: Again there shall be heard from this

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[4] Jeremiah 7:34. Similar threats using this same phrase appear in Jeremiah 16:9 and 25:10.
[5] Jeremiah 16

> place, which you say is ruined, without man or beast – in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without a man, without inhabitants, without beast – The sound of mirth and joy, the voice of bridegroom and bride, the voice of those who cry 'Give thanks to the LORD of Hosts, for the LORD is good, for His kindness is everlasting!' as they bring thanksgiving offerings to the House of the LORD. For I will restore the fortunes of the land as of old – said the LORD."[6]

In all cases, the sounds of joy and mirth are mentioned alongside the sound of groom and bride. These sounds, as well as the sounds associated with thanksgiving offerings, are emblematic of the Jerusalem area and of the Temple. The people know that without the sounds of joy and of the groom and bride, Jerusalem is not a city where God is present. Without these things, order does not exist in their world. The joy of groom and bride returning to their land means a renewed relationship with God. This type of joy is mentioned in the same breath as animal sacrifice, thus presenting the two types of joy as equally important and acceptable.

What constitutes simchah between groom and bride is not explicitly stated in the book of Jeremiah. The phrase "sound of groom and bride" may refer to their rejoicing in each other's company, physically or otherwise, but more likely refers to the sounds that accompany wedding ceremonies. The sounds of wedding ceremonies indicate that Israelites are marrying each other and creating a new generation. It shows that the plagues of famine and sword on the land are over, and signifies hope for the people and praise to God. It also

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[6] Jeremiah 33:10-11

signals a continuation of Israel's covenant with God, and God fulfilling the stipulations therein, including blessing Israel with peace and fertility. In getting married, Israelites are once again able to fulfill the divine commandment "be fruitful and multiply". The prophet sees that the ability and desire to fulfill God's commandments and to populate the land are reason to rejoice.

From these biblical texts, we see that simchah between a man and a woman may include sexual intercourse, private time together, wedding ceremonies, or the day-to-day joys of married life. Although the texts do not explicitly equate simchah with sexual relations, they do allow for that possibility and may use the term as a euphemism for such activity.

Simchah Between a Man and a Woman in Rabbinic Texts

The rabbis, following the biblical tradition, also saw a link between the joy between and man and a woman and simchah. In some cases this meant the joy of sexual intercourse, and in some cases it meant other things, such as making a feast for a bride and groom or providing them with gifts. We see both possibilities in b. Baba Batra 144b-145a. This text contains a long and complicated legal discussion that deals with the need to return wedding gifts following the death of the groom or bride before the marriage ceremony. Gifts are shown to be a concrete source of joy for the couple.[7] If, however, the groom dies, then the woman does not need to return the gifts. Her responsibility was to the groom alone, not to his family. In speaking about her obligation to the deceased groom, she says "Give me my husband and I will rejoice with him." She was unable to fulfill this responsibility to the groom only because he died, not through any fault of her own. Even though she received

[7] Anderson, p. 31

gifts, she is still not able to rejoice, which must mean there is another form of rejoicing she is no longer able to do. Gifts are not the only form of rejoicing at a wedding or in marriage, there is another type of joy. This joy is the consummation of the marriage.[8] Although the rabbis in this text do not explicitly state that rejoicing with a groom means having sexual intercourse with him, it is implied and is indeed necessary for this legal discussion to make any sense.

A clearer legal discussion concerning the simchah of a groom and bride appears in b. Sukkah 25b. This text, like the one before, presents the simchah of marriage as related both to a feast and to consummating the marriage. This Amoraic text assumes a law found in Tannaitic material, m. Moed Katan 1:7, which states, "Wives shall not be taken in marriage during the festival. Neither virgins, widows, nor the fulfilling of the levirate obligation. Because it would be a joy for them."[9] Here, the rabbis are not saying that joy is a bad thing, but are presenting the idea that a person should not mix commanded joys. They are expressing the talmudic concept of "*ein m'arvin simchah b'simchah*". If a person is commanded to rejoice during a festival and is also commanded to rejoice in marriage, then the two must be done separately. Anderson notes that this *mishnah* does not make clear which joys cannot be mixed. If they are only speaking about the joy of consummating a marriage, then perhaps a couple could get married a day before the festival begins and consummate the marriage before the festival begins. The seven days of feasting could then be merged with the festival.[10]

The discussion found in the Talmud is as follows:

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[8] Ibid. p. 32

[9] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 32

[10] pp. 32-33

> R. Abba b. Zabda said in the name of Rab: A bridegroom and groomsmen and all the wedding guests are free from the obligation of *Sukkah* for all seven days. Why? Because they must rejoice. But let them eat in the *sukkah* and rejoice in the *sukkah.* But there is no proper rejoicing except under the bridal canopy! So let them eat in the *sukkah* and rejoice under the bridal canopy. But there is no real rejoicing except where the banquet is held. Then why not set up a canopy in the *sukkah*? R. Abbaye said: [This is impossible] because of the problem of privacy. Raba said: [This is impossible] because of the discomfort of the bridegroom. R. Zera said "I ate in the *sukkah* and was glad in the canopy and so much more was my heart glad for having fulfilled two commandments."[11]

This text is curious in that it presents two forms of pure joy: joy under the bridal canopy and joy where the banquet takes place. It does not say that one type of joy is more important than the other, and in fact says that both are commandments and both are equally important. Rabbi Zera concludes that it is possible to fulfill both commandments, and that mixing the different types of joy is not really a problem. This shows that the simchah of eating in the *sukkah* is different than the simchah of being under the bridal canopy. In this case, we must explore what the rabbis meant when they spoke of the simchah that the bride and groom experience under the bridal canopy.

Through this discussion, we see that it would not be appropriate to set up the bridal

[11] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 33

canopy in the *sukkah*. If the couple needs privacy in order to rejoice under the bridal canopy, then we must assume that their rejoicing consists of physical intimacy, and most likely consists of consummating the marriage through sexual intercourse. Rashi comments on this part of the discussion, explaining, "The *sukkah* is small and open on one side...and so the groom will be embarrassed to fondle his bride". Rashi assumes that rejoicing with a bride must mean engaging in sexual relations, which would not be an appropriate act in which to engage while in public.[12]

We cannot speak about the joy between a bride and groom without speaking about the seven blessings that the Talmud instructs the wedding party to recite during the seven days of feasting. The blessings that mention simchah are,

> "May the barren greatly be glad and exult when her children will be gathered in her midst in joy. Blessed are You, O Lord, who makes Zion joyful through her children. May You make the loved companions greatly rejoice, even as of old You did make joyful Your creature in the Garden of Eden. Blessed are You, O Lord, who makes bridegroom and bride to rejoice. Blessed are You, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who has created gladness and joy, bridegroom and bride, gladness, song, mirth, and delight, love, and brotherhood, and peace, and friendship. Speedily, O Lord our God, may be heard in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of gladness and the voice of joy, the voice of the bridegroom and

[12] Anderson, p. 33

> the voice of the bride, the voice of the singing of bridegrooms from their canopies and of youths from their feasts of song. Blessed are You, O Lord, who makes the bridegroom to rejoice with the bride."[13]

This text reappropriates the texts from Jeremiah, mentioned above. These blessings do not say exactly what constitutes simchah for the bride and groom. Several blessings though, do indicate that simchah between a bride and groom may include sexual relations. They speak of a barren woman rejoicing in having many children, and also speak of Adam and Eve, to whom the *mitzvah* "be fruitful and multiply"[14] was given. These references to procreation show that the rabbis saw a connection between simchah and sexual intercourse when it leads to offspring.

Beyond the wedding, marriage is also presented as a source of joy and a precondition for it.[15] In b. Yevamot 62b, we find the statement: "Any man who who has no wife lives without joy, without blessing, without goodness." The joy between a husband and wife involves sexual relations, but also has a greater purpose. The joy of sexual relations between a husband and wife in important in that it can lead to children. The rabbis even go so far as to make a connection between the joy the couple experiences during sex and the production of male children. In b. Baba Batra 10b we find, "What is a man to do in order that he may have male offspring?...R. Joshua says that he should make his wife joyful to perform the marital office."[16] This tells the reader that in order to receive that which is desirable, male children, he must make sex something his wife enjoys.

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[13] b. Ketubot 8a. Translation adapted from Soncino
[14] Genesis 1:28
[15] Silberman, Lou H. "Joy". *Encyclopaedia Judaica*
[16] Translation taken from Soncino.

The Talmud speaks up in several places for allowing the woman to enjoy sexual relations. B. Nedarim 20b includes a parable in which a man poured out his passions as though possessed by a demon, and does not speak of him positively.[17] Another text expresses the woman's need for joy in sex by stating, "Just as a lion tramples and devours and has no shame, so a boorish man strikes and copulates and has no shame."[18] Without using the word "simchah", these texts clearly show the importance of allowing one's wife to enjoy sexual relations.

According to the rabbis, the joy of sexual relations with a wife is a commandment a man must fulfill. In b. Pesachim 72b, we find a legal discussion in which the rabbis are speaking about the *mitzvah* of making a wife rejoice through sex. Raba says, "A man is required to make his wife rejoice in the matter of *mitzvah*." It is in this text that we also find the rabbinic term for the commandment of a man to engage regularly in sexual relations with his wife, *simchat onah*. A man is required to give his wife joy through sex even when it is not for the sake of procreation, and he needs to do so even when she is pregnant. *Simchat onah* will later become the normal term within Jewish literature for the commandment of rejoicing in sex with one's wife.

So far, we have explored halakhic discussions in which the rabbis speak of simchah between an man and a woman. Anderson argues that aggadic texts have been ignored when speaking about this type of joy. In order to rectify this, he brings a strange and interesting text from p. Chagigah 2:2/77d.[19] In this text, Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach is charged with the task of defeating the eighty witches of Ashkelon. He assembles eighty marriageable young

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[17] Anderson, p. 56

[18] b. Pesachim 49b. Translation taken from Anderson, p. 57

[19] A version of this text can also be found in p. Sanhedrin 6:9/23c

men and instructs them, "when you enter each of you shall embrace one of the women as for making love and thus you will remove their feet from the ground. For a witch cannot do anything when her feet are off the ground." He tricks the witches into trusting him, and we see that the witches are able to conjure up plenty of food and drink. When they ask him what powers he has, he replies, "I can whistle twice and bring for you eighty young marriageable men who will rejoice with you and make you rejoice!" The witches respond favorably to this, at which point the men enter and the rabbi says, "Let each take a partner and 'know' her." The men do so, and Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach defeats the witches when their feet are off the ground.[20]

This story shows that "rejoicing" can only mean engaging in sexual relations. The witches already have food and drink, so they would not need help rejoicing in that way. He tells the men to each "know" a woman, which is a common biblical euphemism for sex. While the rabbi does speak about marriage, it seems that his reference to "rejoicing" may mean sexual relations alone. Marriage may be an outcome of sexual relations for which the witches hope, but it is not necessary for the act of rejoicing to take place. Indeed, before the eighty men entered the cave, the rabbi instructed them to "assume the conjugal position". The women are not surprised when the men assume the conjugal position with them, meaning they must have expected this to happen based on the rabbi's offer to bring men who will rejoice with them. In the mind of every character in this story, simchah between women and men is equivalent to sex. The link between simchah and sexual relations in this story cannot be denied.[21] In these texts, we see that when the rabbis speak of engaging in simchah

[20] Translation taken from Anderson, pp. 34-35
[21] Anderson, p. 35

through sexual relations there is indeed a performative element, but there is also an emotion or internal state involved. Simchah between a man and a woman, according to the rabbis, includes and goes beyond sexual pleasure.

The story of Rabbi Shimon ben Shetach and the eighty witches of Ashkelon is an example of an aggadic rabbinic text in which simchah between women and men means the same thing as sexual relations. It is interesting that in a non-halakhic text, simchah is presented as sex not between husbands and wives, but between unmarried men and women. It is true that the rabbis believed sex to be one way a couple could become betrothed, but this text opens up the possibility that people sometimes engage in sexual relations for the sake of joy and nothing else.

Through these rabbinic texts, we see that simchah between a man and a woman may include sexual relations, but may also include feasting at a wedding, or enjoying each other's presence. The rabbis stress the importance of making marital sexual relations something both members of the couple can enjoy, and even go as far as commanding regular sexual relations if the wife so desires. For the rabbis, sexual relations within a marriage is indeed about procreation, but this is not its sole purpose. By speaking of sexual relations as simchah, the rabbis are presenting the idea that sex is at times done for the sake of enjoyment, not only for creating offspring. They allow for sex to occur between couples even after they have fulfilled the biblical commandment *pru u'rvu*, be fruitful and multiply. The rabbis believed that there was a minimum level of ritual behavior for joy in sex, but they also believed that there was a deeper level of spiritual obedience that went beyond the minimum. This included working to help the woman enjoy sexual relations.[22] In this way,

[22] Ibid. pp. 55-56

joy comes about through a specific physical activity, but is also an internal state of being that a person feels when engaging in this activity.

Simchah Between a Man and a Woman in Post-Rabbinic Texts

Jewish thinkers after the time of the Talmud differed in their views on sexual relations and simchah. The medieval Talmudic commentator Rabbi Abraham ben David (Ravad) believed that the Talmud was speaking not only about the necessity of sexual relations, but also about their character. He believed that the commandment, *simchat ishto,* meant not only that one needed to have sex with one's wife, but that he needed to provide her with sexual pleasure.[23] He believed that a man needed to focus on sex with his wife, and thus said that a couple should have sex at night, when there are no external stimuli and the man can take his time. Basis his ideas on some found in the Talmud, Ravad instructed his readers that the commandment also included speaking words of tenderness before sex, not forcing themselves on their wives, not being in a state of enmity, and not being intoxicated during sex.[24] This is particularly interesting given the biblical texts mentioned above that speak of the intoxicating effect simchah between and man and a woman can have.

The thirteenth century anonymous text, Iggeret Ha-Kodesh, which was traditionally, yet falsely attributed to Nachmanides, speaks about the joy one should have and bring to a woman during sexual relations. This kabbalistic text was very influential in its time, and was quoted by later Jewish thinkers. It was the first popular work where kabbalistic teachings were applied to everyday activities. The text argues that sexual relations should be enjoyed

[23] Ibid. p. 56
[24] Ibid.

by both parties, and that it is actually a pious act to have sex with one's wife. The author also states that proper sexual relations between a husband and wife have mystical significance and "contribute to the achievement of unity in the divine world."[25]

Not all post-rabbinic authors, though, looked positively on sexual relations and the simchah associated with them. Iggeret ha-Kodesh can be seen as a polemic against Maimonides, "who regarded sexual activity as being a lower, less spiritual level of life."[26] The writer opposes Maimonides' claims that the sense of touch is disgraceful and the human body is loathsome.[27] The existence of this polemic shows that Maimonides' negative views on human sexuality and the human body were well-known, but not universally accepted.

The Musar text, Orchot Tzadikim, presents the joy that arises through some forms of sexual relations as evil. The author writes, "There is another kind of joy as bitter as wormwood – that of the pursuers of fornication, theft, and the other transgressions – who rejoice in the attainment of their evil desires. About these it is written: 'Who rejoice to do evil and regale in the perverseness of evil.'[28] Their punishment is great unto the nethermost pit."[29] Here, the author expresses the belief that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is an evil thing, and even though joy may come from it, this is the wrong kind of joy. He also speaks out against the joy that arises from non-married men and women being in each other's presence, saying, "Nor should joy come from men and women together, for such joy is lightheadedness."[30] This is a strict position that seeks to protect Jews from confusing

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[25] Dan, Joseph. "Iggeret ha-Kodesh", *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

[26] Ibid.

[27] Roi, Biti. "Iggeret Ha-Kodesh." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia.* 1 March 2009. Jewish Women's Archive. January 7, 2011 <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/iggeret-ha-kodesh>.

[28] Proverbs 2:4

[29] Translation taken from Zaloshinsky, Gavriel, ed. *The Ways of the Tzadikim - Sefer Orchot Tzadikim.* Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1994. p. 171

[30] Zaloshinsky, p. 213

commanded joy with evil joy.

According to the author, however, it is possible for a Jew to rejoice with a bride and groom in a way that is positive, and even praiseworthy. On this point, we find, "Joy is also good for making joyful the bride and the groom, as it is written: 'The sound of gladness and the sound of joy, the sound of the bridegroom and the sound of the bride.'"[31] The author once again uses the biblical tradition to prove his point. In doing so, he presents a tempered view of the simchah that arises between the union of men and women. The potential for good and bad exists in this type of joy, and one should therefore act according to the commandments and according to the guidelines that this author presents. Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav also speaks about the great joy that can come about through celebrating with a bride and groom, specifically through dancing at a wedding.[32]

It is through these texts that we see a connection between simchah and sexual relations. We also see a connection between simchah and other types of joy that can come about through a caring relationship between a man and a woman. The Hebrew Bible, rabbis, and post-rabbinic thinkers all present ways for men and women to rejoice together. These include activities that in some contexts can be good, and even commanded. They also include activities that can be bad in some contexts. It seems that the activities themselves, sexual and otherwise, have the potential to bring joy, but at times do not fulfill that potential. In exploring the discussions concerning marital sex throughout Jewish history, we find that while it is a commanded act, it can produce differing levels of joy for both parties. It seems that simchah is the goal of the activity, and comes about when the two parties make an effort

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Fishbane, Michael. *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. p. 179

to engage in the activity in caring and mutually pleasurable ways. Thus, engaging in simchah in this case means going beyond the basic performance of a *mitzvah* and acting ethically and lovingly. In this way, engaging in simchah includes caring for a loved-one in whom a Jew sees the image of the divine. In doing so, the Jew is able to joyfully do God's will and more.

Chapter 6

Simchah at Specific Times

Times to Engage in Simchah in the Hebrew Bible

This chapter will show that the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish works call for Israelites (and Jews) to engage in simchah at certain specific times throughout the year, throughout a lifetime, and throughout the life of the Jewish community and world. There are also times when simchah is inappropriate, which is a subject that will be examined in the final section of this chapter. We have already explored above some references to the need to experience joy or engage in the activities that constitute simchah at specific times. In the Torah, the Israelites are commanded to rejoice on the festivals, largely through sacrifice and the acts associated with sacrifice.[1] The commandments concerning rejoicing on the three major festivals, Pesach, Shavuot, and Sukkot, are clear in the biblical text and are also dealt with in rabbinic literature, as we have seen.

In addition to the commands to "rejoice before the LORD" found in Deuteronomy, we find two other biblical texts in which the Israelites are commanded to rejoice during the festivals. The first is Leviticus 23:40, which in reference to the festival that takes place on the "fifteenth day of the seventh month"[2], states "On the first day you shall take the product of the *hadar* trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days." This observance is to be practiced "as a law for all time, throughout the ages."[3] This is a description of the festival that would later be called Sukkot, and calls on the Israelites to rejoice at this time of year as

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1 Deuteronomy 16
2 Leviticus 23:39
3 Ibid v. 41

long as they exist. This is not a festival that is to occur once, the community is called upon to engage in simchah at this time every single year. Rejoicing at this time requires specific actions, but does not say explicitly that any mood or emotion is necessary.

The next place in the Hebrew Bible where the Israelites are commanded to rejoice on the festivals appears is in Numbers 10:10. This text commands, "And on your joyous occasions—your fixed festivals and new moon days—you shall sound the trumpets over your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being. They shall be a reminder of you before your God: I, the LORD, and your God."[4] This text is particularly interesting for several reasons. First, it spells out ways in which the Israelite community is to rejoice, thus showing the performative element that simchah necessitates.[5] Second, it introduces the idea of a "*yom simchah*", a day of joy, and seems to equate it with the festivals and new moons. This verse could, however, be read in a different way. The NJPS translation presents "*yom simchatchem*" as a general category that includes two sub-categories – fixed festivals and new moons, but it is also possible that the text is describing three different types of special days for the Israelite community – days of joy, fixed festivals, and new moons. If we read the text in this way, then fixed festivals and new moons would be separate from days of joy. Though no traditional commentators read this text according to the second reading, both readings are plausible, which means that this text may or may not be expanding the commandment to rejoice to the new moon celebrations. In either case, this text connects simchah with sacrificing burnt offerings and well-being offerings, and accompanying these

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[4] The original Hebrew of this verse may be helpful here. It reads, וּבְיוֹם שִׂמְחַתְכֶם וּבְמוֹעֲדֵיכֶם וּבְרָאשֵׁי חָדְשֵׁיכֶם וּתְקַעְתֶּם בַּחֲצֹצְרֹת עַל עֹלֹתֵיכֶם וְעַל זִבְחֵי שַׁלְמֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לָכֶם לְזִכָּרוֹן לִפְנֵי אֱלֹהֵיכֶם אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

[5] Anderson, Gary A. *A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion.* Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991. p. 20

sacrifices with the sounding of trumpets. These are all presented as activities that constitute simchah that are to be performed at specific times.

The three major festivals and new moons are not the only specific times during which biblical texts call for the community and individuals to engage in simchah. The book of Esther describes the Jews of Shushan and the surrounding provinces crying out in joy and engaging in "light and joy, gladness and honor"[6] at the time of victory. They also made days of feasting and joy when the king's decree against the Jews was to be implemented, but was not. The text speaks about specific days and the ways in which the Jews celebrated, saying, "That was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar; and they rested on the fourteenth day and made it a day of feasting and joy."[7] The text continues, describing the Jews of Shushan resting, feasting, and engaging in simchah on the fifteenth day of the month of Adar. This is presented as an etiology for the practice of Jews who live in unwalled cities to celebrate this joyous holiday on the fourteenth day of the month.[8] While this text does not call on Jews to rejoice on this day for all time, it does describe a practice within the Jewish community that continued after the first year, and it gives a reason for rejoicing on a particular day. This specific time for rejoicing is of course now widely known as the holiday of Purim, a holiday during which Jews continue to rejoice in the modern period. The text calls for specific behaviors, feasting and giving gifts,[9] as a way to engage in simchah. It is likely that a joyful mood accompanied these actions, but the performed actions are what the text calls for and what it identifies as simchah.

The book of Nehemiah presents a celebration in which the Jews engage when they

[6] Esther 8:16-17
[7] Ibid. 9:17
[8] Ibid. vv.18-19
[9] Ibid. v. 19

return to the Land of Israel after exile. The first part of this celebration occurs "on the first day of the seventh month,"[10] or the first of Tishrei. This is the date of what the Hebrew Bible calls *Yom Teruah*, or *Yom HaZikaron,* which would later be termed Rosh HaShanah. Ezra and Nehemiah, the communal leaders, tell the people, "Go, eat choice foods and drink sweet drinks and send portions to whoever has nothing prepared, for the day is holy to our Lord. Do not be sad, for your rejoicing in the LORD is the source of your strength."[11] The people obey, making great joy (*v'la'asot simchah gedolah*), "for they understood the things they were told."[12] This text presents joy at a specific time in the life of a community and also at an important time of year. It presents concrete and acceptable ways for a community to engage in simchah, which include eating, drinking, and charitable giving. The reasons for all of these acts are that the day is holy to God, and rejoicing in God gives strength to the people.

The book of Nehemiah's description of communal celebration continues, presenting forms of rejoicing that look like those performed on the festival of Sukkot. The text states that the heads of the clans gathered together on the second day and studied the Teaching. In doing so, they find the instructions for the festival in which the Israelites dwell in booths, or *sukkot*, for seven days. It then describes the people celebrating this festival.[13] The text does not, however, say that the people waited until the prescribed time in the seventh month to do so. If the people indeed did not wait, but began to rejoice on the second day of the month, then this action is quite curious. As described in the book of Nehemiah, the festival may

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[10] Nehemiah 8:1
[11] Ibid. v.10
[12] Ibid. v.12
[13] Ibid. vv.13-18

have begun on the second day of the month and lasted seven days,[14] rather than beginning on the fourteenth day of the month and lasting seven days, as called for in Leviticus 23, quoted above. It states, "The whole community that returned from the captivity made booths and dwelt in the booths—the Israelites had not done so from the days of Joshua son of Nun to that day—and there was very great rejoicing."[15] This brings up the possibility that the text from which the people in the book of Nehemiah were working may not have been Leviticus, which clearly states the prescribed dates for this festival. It is possible that the text from which they were working was Deuteronomy, which does not give a specific calendrical date for the festival of Sukkot to take place.[16] It is clear from this text, though, that the festival of booths was celebrated and that it was a time of significant joy for the Israelite community. In celebrating this festival, the community was once again able to engage in simchah as it had not done in many years, perhaps even since the Israelites first entered into the Land of Israel.

Times to Engage in Simchah in Rabbinic Literature

We have already encountered rabbinic texts that speak about the commandment to rejoice during the festivals of Pesach, Sukkot, and Shavuot. These texts and others make it quite clear that Jews are expected to rejoice through various means on these major festivals. While the rabbis may have changed the means by which this joy was attained and expressed, the requirement for simchah on these specific days remained constant. We have also seen rabbinic texts that mandate simchah at wedding ceremonies and in the days following them.

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[14] Ibid. v.13
[15] Ibid. v.17
[16] Deuteronomy 16:13-15

The rabbis describe wedding guests and the bride and groom engaging in simchah of various types, including marital sexual relations, gift giving, dancing, and feasting. These are specific times in which the rabbis required Jews to engage in simchah.

We have also explored several discussions in which the rabbis deal with the joy that can be experienced or performed after the Destruction of the Second Temple. Some have argued that it is possible to engage in simchah while there is no Temple, while others have approached this idea with hesitancy. There are rabbinic texts that argue that one cannot engage in true simchah until the sacrificial cult returns, or until the world to come. B. Baba Batra 60b calls for mourning amongst the Jewish people because of the destruction of Jerusalem. It argues that "Whoever mourns for Zion will be privileged to behold her joy, as it says, 'Rejoice with Jerusalem and be glad for her,'[17]". Thus, a cessation of joy in this world will merit a person to experience joy in the world to come, when there is a rebuilt Jerusalem and the sacrificial cult again exists.

This text, however, does not require that Jews become ascetics. Although they should mourn for Jerusalem, they should not mourn too extremely. Rabbi Joshua approaches the ascetics who are refraining from eating meat and drinking wine, and shows them that they cannot possibly cease consuming things that were consumed at the Temple. If they actually did this, they would be unable consume bread, fruit, or water. He instructs them that they must mourn to some extent, but not too much. They must consume some of those things in which they found joy and in which they fulfilled the commandment of rejoicing. Here, Rabbi Joshua, argues that while true simchah may not again exist until Jerusalem is rebuilt, the people must allow themselves to engage in some level of simchah. The contrast between

[17] Isaiah 66:10

simchah and mourning will be explored in the second part of this chapter.

The link between the return of real simchah and the world to come, or the eschaton, can be seen in two other rabbinic texts, one early and one late. In commenting on Leviticus, the earlier text, Leviticus Rabbah 20:2 states, "'Israel rejoiced in his maker' is not written here, but rather 'Israel will rejoice'[18]. Israel shall rejoice in the works of the Holy One, blessed be He, in the world to come."[19] This *midrash* switches the tense of the verb "to rejoice" from past to future in order to give a proof text for the distinctly rabbinic idea that Israel will only rejoice once the world is vastly different from its current reality. The later rabbinic text, Midrash Tehillim on Psalms 97:1 states, "As long as the kingdom of Edom abides, there will be no rejoicing on the earth."[20] This text is responding to the reality of an oppressive power, the Roman Empire, ruling over the Jewish people. It presents a hope that this evil power will one day be gone from the earth, and does not allow for the possibility of simchah to exist at the same time as the kingdom of Edom. In presenting this idea, the midrashic text is looking toward the world to come as a specific time in which there will be simchah for the Jewish people. Both of these *midrashim* argue that simchah does belong in a specific time, but that time is not the present. In witnessing horrible present realities, each rabbinic text envisions a better future in which simchah will be naturally and easily achieved. Each text puts the possibility of engaging in true simchah off until the future, and in doing so, professes a belief that there will again come a time when the Jewish people engage in simchah. This inner state and the performed activities that accompany it are not gone permanently from the world or from Jewish existence.

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[18] Psalms 149:2

[19] Translation taken from Anderson, p. 115

[20] Translation taken from Anderson, Ibid.

Times to Engage in Simchah in Post-Rabbinic Literature

Isaiah 58:13 relates Shabbat to the word *oneg*, meaning delight, but does not speak of simchah in relation to Shabbat. It is clear from this text that Shabbat is supposed to be a day of gladness, but it is not clear from this text whether Shabbat is a specific time during which the Israelites should engage in simchah. The rabbis have much to say about Shabbat and the laws surrounding it, but it is only after the rabbinic period that we find texts that speak explicitly about simchah and Shabbat. Traditional and modern Shabbat liturgy includes many references to simchah. While some of this liturgy may have existed in rabbinic times, it is only when we look at the earliest *siddurim*, dating from the ninth century at the earliest, that we find a liturgical connection between simchah and Shabbat. While the modern *siddur* contains several mentions of simchah in the weekday liturgy, many more abound in the Shabbat liturgy. It is through these references to simchah in the Shabbat liturgy that we see a trend in the late to post-rabbinic period to present Shabbat as a specific time in which Jews should engage in simchah.

The first layer of liturgical additions to Shabbat services that mention simchah comes from the early post-Amoraic period. Many of the liturgical additions that speak of simchah are found within the portion of the *Amidah* the recounts the holiness of the day, *Kedushat HaYom*. Within this liturgical portion, some of the individual prayers change depending on the type of service, and some remain constant. The primary piece that remains constant includes the phrase "make us joyful with your salvation". This paragraph is found in

Machzor Vitry,[21] which dates to the eleventh century.[22] It presents simchah as an appropriate way to acknowledge the sanctity of the day. It looks forward to the joy of salvation, which hearkens back to the rabbinic texts that spoke of the simchah that is to be found in the world to come.

The *Kedushat HaYom* section of the Shabbat morning service begins by stating "Moses rejoiced in the gift of his portion", thus presenting Moses as a role-model for the worshipper's own joy on Shabbat. According to Naftali Vider, this piece was written and included in the prayer service "as a protest against Christianity's abandonment the observance of the seventh day in favor of Sunday."[23] If this is the case, then we see a liturgical author using simchah in a polemic against a group of people, and holding up simchah in receiving God's commandments, including the commandment of resting on the seventh day, as a praiseworthy act.

In the *Musaf* section of the service, which appears in traditional *siddurim*, but not in Reform ones, we find a paragraph entitled *Yismechu*, meaning "you shall rejoice". This paragraph also appears in Reform *siddurim*, attached to *Kedushat HaYom* or as an opening to the *Amidah*. This text appears in Machzor Vitry as well as in Seder Rav Amram Gaon,[24] which was Judaism's first true prayerbook and dates to the ninth century.[25] This liturgical piece speaks of those who observe and delight in Shabbat as being able to rejoice in God's work: the work of creation. Like the other texts, it speaks of joy while also speaking about the sanctity of Shabbat. This text in particular takes the verse from Isaiah into account,

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[21] Idelsohn, A. Z. *Jewish Liturgy and Its Development*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932. p. 132

[22] Goldschmidt, Ernst Daniel. "Mahzor Vitry", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

[23] Hammer, Reuven. *Or Hadash: A Commentary on Siddur Sim Shalom for Shabbat and Festivals*. New York: The Rabbinical Assembly, 2003. p.117

[24] Idelsohn, p. 132

[25] Goldschmidt, Ernst Daniel. "Prayerbooks", *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

calling on Jews to call Shabbat "a delight" in order to rejoice in God's creation.

An important, but much later layer of the Shabbat liturgy that puts forth the idea of rejoicing on Shabbat is the kabbalistic addition at the beginning of the *Erev Shabbat* service, entitled *Kabbalat Shabbat.* This section includes a series of psalms, as well as a liturgical poem entitled *L'chah Dodi*, written by Shlomo HaLevi Alkabetz, an early sixteenth century kabbalist.[26] This poem and its surrounding psalms help the worshipper welcome the Shabbat day and prepare for it. Several of the psalms include references to simchah. While Psalms 92 speaks explicitly about Shabbat and rejoicing in God's works, the other psalms are not obvious choices for Shabbat recitation. By including them in a service meant to welcome the Shabbat day, the kabbalists reframed the meaning of these psalms and their purpose. These psalms speak of different things, both human and non-human, rejoicing as a form of praise and thanks to God, including the heavens,[27] many islands,[28] Zion,[29] the upright of heart,[30] and righteous people.[31] In the context of *Kabbalat Shabbat,* these references present simchah as a proper expression of welcome to the seventh day and also as an appropriate reaction to witnessing God's creation and the cessation thereof.

The poem, *L'chah Dodi*, contains two mentions of simchah, both of which come toward the end of the text. The text calls the readers to awaken and arise from their place in order to greet Shabbat. It speaks of an end to hardship and oppression, painting a picture of a time when God will rule over the world and the Land of Israel will be restored to its prior prestige. It looks forward to a time when a messianic figure, "*ish ben partzi*", has come into

[26] Bayer, Bathja. "Lekhah Dodi", *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*
[27] Psalms 96:11
[28] Ibid. 97:1
[29] Ibid. v.8
[30] Ibid. v.11
[31] Ibid. v. 12

the world. In the eighth stanza, we see that when the Messiah comes, the worshippers will be able to rejoice and be merry (*al yad ish ben partzi, v'nism'chah v'nagilah*). The last stanza calls upon the Shabbat bride to enter in peace, joy, and gladness (*bo'i v'shalom ateret ba'alah, gam b'sichah u'vtzoholah*). In doing so, the poem presents the possibility for joy to exist even though the world to come is not yet here. This is in line with the Talmud, which states that Shabbat is one sixtieth of the world to come.[32] While the simchah in which we engage on Shabbat may not be the true simchah in which we will engage in the world to come, Shabbat does bring some semblance of that simchah with it on a regular basis. In this way, the liturgy reminds the worshipper that there is joy to be found in this world, and it also reminds the worshipper to cherish and observe Shabbat.

In examining these additions to the Shabbat liturgy that speak so heavily about simchah, we see that post-rabbinic thinkers, liturgists, and communal leaders saw Shabbat as a specific time during which Jews should engage in simchah. These texts present Jewish worshippers with role-models for rejoicing on Shabbat and highlight the important role they saw joy playing in the observance of Shabbat. While the calls to delight on Shabbat existed in biblical times, it was only later that Jewish texts equated this delight with simchah. In doing so, these texts raise the importance of Shabbat. While Shabbat is widely presented within Jewish text and tradition to be higher in holiness than the festivals, it is not clearly presented that Shabbat is higher than the festivals in simchah. In speaking of engaging in simchah on Shabbat, these texts put it on a similar level as the three major festivals and major life cycle events. Simchah is thus something in which Jews should engage on a weekly basis, not just several times throughout the year.

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[32] b. Berachot 57b

Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, whose Chasidic tradition was influenced greatly by *Kabbalah*, spoke about engaging in simchah on a regular basis as well as working towards a simchah in the world to come. He believed that it was a "*mitzvah gedolah*", a great commandment to be in joy always, "resisting the sickness of sadness with an ever-expanding joy."[33] In this view, simchah is not reserved for a specific time or day of the week, but is something in which a Jew should always be engaged. This is so important to Rabbi Nachman, that he calls it *tikkun*, redemptive repair. In another text, Rabbi Nachman quotes Isaiah 55:12, which tells the Israelites that they will leave the Babylonian exile in joy, and shows his belief that one does not need to wait for physical redemption, or for a cosmic world to come. Instead, he argues that a person has the ability to leave his own inner Babylon of "natural desire and confusion of thought" by engaging in simchah, specifically the simchah of Shabbat observance and other commandments.[34] Thus, Rabbi Nachman believes that simchah is always attainable, and always appropriate. While Shabbat observance is one source of simchah, it is not the only one. In order to engage in simchah, a Jew does not need to wait for a specific time or event, and indeed should not do so.

Times Not to Engage in Simchah

Just as there are specific times in which it is appropriate and commanded for a Jew to engage in simchah, there are also times within the Jewish year and life-cycle during which simchah is inappropriate. We have already encountered some texts that speak about joy leaving Jerusalem and the Land of Israel, as well as texts that presume that simchah is not

[33] Fishbane, Michael. *The Exegetical Imagination: On Jewish Thought and Theology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998. p. 169
[34] Ibid. p. 170

commanded the majority of the time. It seems that even in the biblical text, times of mourning are seen as times when it is difficult if not undesirable to engage in simchah.[35]

Anderson believes that the rabbis constructed the Jewish mourning process as a cessation of engaging in simchah. B. Moed Katan 14b contains a discussion amongst the rabbis about what a mourner is allowed to do on a festival. The tension comes because one is commanded to rejoice on the festival, but there is an assumption that mourners refrain from engaging in simchah. The rabbis decide that a mourner should suspend the mourning process during a festival in order to fulfill the commandment. If the rabbis were speaking about inner emotional states of mourning and joy, then it would be very difficult for a mourner to switch from mourning to rejoicing simply because the festival has begun. This cannot be the case. Instead, the rabbis are discussing conflicting ritual states rather than emotional states.[36] They cannot command a mourner to stop feeling sad and start feeling joyful, but they can command the mourner to cease engaging in ritual activities that accompany the mourning process and begin engaging in ritual activities that accompany rejoicing on festivals.

This discussion can only take place if the Jewish conception of mourning necessitates the mourner to not engage in simchah. Many of the things in which a mourner is prohibited to engage are things that have been shown in previous chapters to relate to simchah: eating in a normal fashion, drinking wine, studying Torah, praying, fulfilling divine commandments, and having sexual relations.[37] The rabbis prohibit the mourner from engaging in these activities without explicitly stating that mourners are prohibited from engaging in simchah.

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[35] See Psalms 137, in which the Israelites are mourning for Jerusalem and find it impossible to engage in simchah through song.

[36] Anderson, p. 50

[37] b. Moed Katan 23b-24a. Mourners are also prohibited from wearing leather shoes and bathing, which are not expressions of joy as presented in this work.

This is implied, though, in their discussion surrounding the need to engage in these joyous activities during festivals and during Shabbat, even if one would otherwise be in a state of mourning. While these are not the only activities a mourner is prohibited to do, the connection between activities the constitute simchah and those that are prohibited to a mourner is striking. Joy, Anderson notes, marks the transition from mundane to sacred space, meaning that God is present when there is simchah, but God is not present when there is mourning. He argues that when a mourner enacts the opposite of simchah, the mourner is identifying himself with the dead and cutting himself off from the divine presence.[38]

There are specific times during which the entire Jewish community is told to behave as mourners and refrain from engaging in simchah. Yom Kippur is one of these days. M. Yoma 8:1 explains that "on the Day of Atonement it is forbidden to eat, drink, bathe, put on any sort of oil, put on a sandal, or engage in sexual relations."[39] This is a day when the entire community is to behave as if it is in mourning, and it is therefore a time in which simchah is inappropriate and even proscribed. The laws concerning the observance of Tisha B'Av include a similar list of prohibited activities, which tells the reader that this day of national mourning is a specific time during which simchah is not allowed. Indeed, the Mishnah even states that "When *Av* comes, rejoicing diminishes."[40] In this text, the rabbis set aside an entire month during which the Jewish community should not engage in simchah. This is contrasted with *Adar*, which is a month during which the rabbis believe simchah increases.[41] *Adar*, the month in which the holiday of Purim occurs, is a month in which Jews are told to

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[38] Anderson, pp. 108-109

[39] Translation taken from Neusner, Jacob. *The Mishnah: A New Translation*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988. p. 277

[40] m. Ta'anit 4:6. Translation taken from Neusner, p. 315

[41] b. Ta'anit 29a

engage in simchah almost to the extreme.

There are also specific events in which Jews are instructed not to rejoice. Proverbs 24:17 speaks of simchah as an inner state of being, stating, "If your enemy falls, do not rejoice; If he trips let not your heart gladden." This verse is quoted in full in m. Avot 4:24, and is built upon in the much later Musar text, Orchot Tzadikim. The author argues, "And there is a joy even worse than this, such as one's rejoicing in his friend's falling short in Divine service or in the paucity of his knowledge." The author quotes a prayer from a talmudic rabbi, Nechuniah ben Hakanah, which reads, "May my friends not stumble in a matter of *halakhah* and I not rejoice in it, may I not stumble in a matter of *halakhah* and they not rejoice in it."[42] The author is very concerned that Jews not rejoice at the wrong time or for the wrong reasons, which leads the reader to believe that he is reacting to common negative behaviors in which he witnessed Jews engaging. We see this in the conclusion of his chapter on simchah. He writes,

> A man must take great care not to rejoice in something which is good for him but injurious to others. So that if one has much grain, he should not rejoice in dearness and famine, and not allow his good to bring him joy through the hardship of others. Nor should he rejoice in a man's death, though he stands to gain an inheritance or other benefits through it. In sum, one must not rejoice in any man's discomfiture for the sake of his pleasure...One should teach himself to be joyful

[42] b. Berachot 28b, quoted in Zaloshinsky, Gavriel, ed. *The Ways of the Tzadikim - Sefer Orchot Tzadikim*. Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1994. p. 169

> when good befalls others, especially when he sees them pursuing *mitzvot* to do the will of the Blessed Creator.[43]

In this text, we see a call to refrain from engaging in simchah for the wrong reasons and at the wrong times. Here, simchah seems to be more of an internal state rather than a series of external actions. It is tempting to feel joyful at the wrong time, indeed, this is still an issue that faces the Jewish community in modern times. The author believes that it takes great will-power, intention, and emotional training in order not to rejoice when his fellows suffer.

This chapter has shown that throughout Jewish history, thinkers and communal leaders have seen a need to rejoice at specific times and also to not rejoice at other specific times. While Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav believed it was a great commandment to be in joy *always*, he seems to have been in the minority. There are appropriate times in which one should engage in simchah and there are inappropriate times in which one should do so. This idea exists not only in Jewish texts, but also in Jewish practice. The prayerbook and regular holiday observances underscore the importance of this idea, and therefore reenforce for all observant Jews the need for simchah and the need for a temporary cessation of simchah.

Very rarely in these traditional Jewish texts do the authors speak of the emotions behind the actions that constitute simchah, but it may be argued that the prescription and proscription of joyous activities at specific times seeks to inform and impact an individual's or a community's emotions. In mandating and encouraging simchah at specific times the rabbis, and thinkers that followed them, perhaps sought to make Jews feel more joyful during holidays, life-cycle events, and commemoration of certain events in history. At the same time, they acknowledged that there were times in which Jews should feel sad and mourn.

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[43] Zaloshinsky, p. 217

Part of this process included a series of activities, but these activities may have also had an effect on a person's mood or emotional state. A person's emotions cannot be legally mandated, but they can be impacted by commanded actions. The rabbis and later thinkers present sadness and mourning as appropriate and even necessary emotions and actions, but they also point toward a future time in which all mourning will cease and true simchah will exist. They present this world to come as an ideal time and place in which the joy of being in God's presence will reign.

Chapter 7

Simchah in Our Time

Simchah in Modern Jewish Thought and Literature

Modern Jewish thinkers and writers have continued the conversation about simchah and its place in Jewish life. In order to better understand how modern Judaism views simchah and engages in it, it is important to look at the ways in which modern Jewish thinkers have dealt with this topic. In some ways, they have kept the older Jewish traditions alive, and in some ways, they have taken on new opinions and beliefs concerning engaging in simchah.

One important modern Jewish thinker who added to this discussion was Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Heschel was a product of Chasidism, and was therefore steeped in the traditions and writings concerning joy that have been mentioned above. Although he voluntarily left that world, its influences on him are apparent when looking at his biography and written works. The idea of simchah appears in his key theological and philosophical work, *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. Among other things, this 1955 book spoke about the role of simchah in the life of the modern religious Jew as well as the place of simchah in Judaism. Heschel believed that simchah was a core element of Judaism. In a continuation of the Jewish traditions and text that we have already seen, Heschel believed that joy came about through deep connection to God and to God's commandments.

For Heschel, experiencing joy meant engaging in sacred action. He wrote, "How else can one learn the joy of loving-kindness, if not by enacting it?"[1] He believed that doing a

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[1] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *God in Search of Man: A Philosophy of Judaism*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1955. p. 345

sacred deed leads one to joy, and he saw no difference between engaging in joy and acting in the service of God.[2] Joy is an outcome of doing God's will, and it is attained only when one thinks about others and thinks about God, not when one thinks about himself. He said, "There is no joy for the self within the self. Joy is found in giving rather than in acquiring; in serving rather than taking."[3] In continuing this thought, Heschel asks whether it is a sin to enjoy doing a good deed, and comes to the conclusion that it is not. Associating oneself with the good deed and with the reward of that deed is desirable within the Jewish tradition, and one should not feel bad for experiencing joy when doing *mitzvot* and serving God.[4] Joy and righteous acts are not only compatible, but each is necessary for the other to exist. On this note, Heschel wrote,

> The power of evil[5] can be consumed in the flames of joy. It may be true that not all joys lead to God, yet all joys come from God. Even lowly merriment has its ultimate origin in holiness. Perhaps this is one of the goals of Jewish education: to learn how to sense the ineffable delight of good deeds. It is said that the joy with which the deed is done is more precious than the deed itself. The good without the joy is a good half done.[6]

Heschel is arguing that a good deed is incomplete if it is not done with the right mood or

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[2] Ibid. p. 355
[3] Ibid. p. 399
[4] Ibid. p. 400
[5] By speaking of "evil" in this section, Heschel means the internal evil drive (*yetzer hara*) that exists within each person. This evil drive can compliment the good drive, but he believes that the good drive must first be strengthened. This is done by engaging in joy, so that one not give in to the powerful evil drive and sin.
[6] Heschel, 1955. p. 385

intention. It is something Jews bring to the deed, rather than something they enact in doing the deed. This is different from many of the rabbinic texts we have encountered, which speak about engaging in simchah as performing certain legislated actions. These actions may have been meant to express an inner mood or even to influence one's mood, but the rabbis tend to present the idea that the actions themselves constitute simchah and the actions alone fulfill the commandment "rejoice before Adonai". For Heschel, the deed itself is not enough. In order for the deed to reach its full potential and in order for it to constitute simchah, it must be performed in a joyful mood and with intention. This differs from Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, who argued that it was a great *mitzvah* to be in simchah always. Heschel, instead, is arguing that in order to perform a great *mitzvah* properly, one must do the deed while in a state of simchah.

He presents the idea that "Judaism is a reminder that joy is a way to God. The *mitzvah* and the holy spirit are incompatible with grief or despair."[7] For Heschel, though, true joy cannot exist outside of service to God, and service of God cannot be accomplished if it is not done joyfully. He writes,

> There is joy in being a Jew, in belonging to Israel, to God, in being able to taste heaven in a sacred deed. There is joy in being a link to eternity, in being able to do His will. A rabbinic principle states that "the *mitzvot* were not given for the purpose of affording pleasure." Yet pleasure is not the same as joy.
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> Joy is not self-centered like pleasure...pleasure is but the pleasure of the joy. There is also a self-enlargement in joy,

[7] Ibid.

> but this is not of its essence. The joy itself attaches not to the subject, but to the object, and to have joy in an object is to value it for its own sake. Joy is thus an active disinterestedness, and its instinctive impulse is not only to maintain its object, but to surrender itself to it and rest freely in it as in something of intrinsic value and promise.[8]

Here, Heschel gives his own definition of joy, which originates in the Jewish textual tradition, but at the same time reacts to modern interpretations and understandings of it. For Heschel, joy only comes about when the Jew gives himself up to God and to doing God's will in the world. Although personal growth is an outcome of joy, it is not the purpose of joy. Heschel also makes an important distinction between pleasure and joy; they are not one and the same. While the *mitzvot* do not exist to give humans pleasure, it is possible that they are there to add to the joy of both God[9] and human beings. Joy adds to one's awareness of God and one's connection to God. For Heschel, simchah is a vehicle through which one can experience the divine presence[10] and enact the divine will.

Heschel also speaks about joy in his book, *The Sabbath*. This is important to note because his discussions about joy and Shabbat synthesize many of the topics we have explored above. In the tradition of the rabbis and post-rabbinic thinkers, he shows Shabbat to be a particularly joyous time. A famous quote that exemplifies this point is, "A thought has blown the market place away. There is a song in the wind and joy in the trees. The

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[8] Ibid. pp.385-386. Heschel derives these ideas from both Jewish and non-Jewish sources. He cites b. Eruvin 31a, b. Rosh HaShanah 28a, and W.R. Boyce Gibson, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. VIII, p. 152a as his sources for this portion of his argument. In doing so, he is presenting a particularly modern view that takes into account classical Jewish texts as well as modern academic texts.

[9] Ibid. p. 357

[10] Ibid. p. 355

Sabbath arrives in the world, scattering a song in the silence of the night: eternity utters a day."[11] This quote, which has now become liturgy in the Reform Movement,[12] shows Heschel's belief that joy enters into the world along with Shabbat. It connects joy with song as well as with the holiday, and in the tradition of the psalms, it presents non-human objects as engaging in joy.

He emphasizes the communal aspect of joy in a story about a prince who threw a party because he wanted to rejoice, but was unable to do so alone. He goes beyond the simple meaning of this story, though, to speak about the place of joy in this world versus the spiritual world. He argues, "The soul cannot celebrate alone, so the body must be invited to partake in the rejoicing of the Sabbath...For the Sabbath is joy, holiness, and rest; joy is part of this world; holiness and rest are something of the world to come."[13] In this text, we see Heschel presenting joy as necessitating earthly, material elements. We have seen the connection between simchah and earthly elements such as wine, food, oils, and sexual relations. In this tradition, Heschel presents joy as belonging in the earthly realm, and as something that necessitates the body. It is curious, though, that he does not present joy as belonging in the world to come. The rabbis and post-rabbinic thinkers believed that true joy could only exist in the world to come, but this text from *The Sabbath* points to a different belief.

The connection between joy, Shabbat, and a wedding ceremony is also made in *The Sabbath*. This is a connection that has been made throughout Jewish history, and especially

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[11] Heschel, Abraham Joshua. *The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1951. p. 67

[12] Elyse D. Frishman, ed. *Mishkan T'filah: A Reform Siddur*. New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 2007. pp. 163, 251

[13] Ibid. p. 19

after the inclusion of *Kabbalat Shabbat* in the *siddur*. Heschel writes, "...just as a man rejoices all the days of the wedding feast, so does man rejoice on the Sabbath...In the morning prayer we say 'Moses rejoiced in the gift [of the Sabbath] bestowed upon him which corresponds to the groom's rejoicing with the bride."[14] Thus, Heschel is presenting the modern reader with a model for properly greeting Shabbat and rejoicing on the holy day. For Heschel, Shabbat is a particularly joyous day because it contains within it many different traditional ways to rejoice. It is like a wedding ceremony, and it includes prayer, study, feasting, song, performing commandments, experiencing an aspect of the world to come, and experiencing God. It is in this book that we see a modern Jewish thinker making the connection between simchah and all of these elements. Heschel is steeped in Jewish tradition and Jewish practice, and joy on Shabbat is a major element of these, even in modern times.

Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, spoke about the modern Jewish view of joy and happiness at the Interfaith Summit on Happiness at Emory University in October of 2010. In his address, Sachs spoke about the differences between *osher* and simchah in Judaism, and why simchah is needed more than *osher* in modern Jewish life. While he argued that *osher* is happiness we feel and can experience on our own, he said that simchah exists only "in virtue of being shared". The purpose of simchah is to give thanks collectively for the miracle of continued life. It is only possible to experience simchah when separate people come together as a community. In his view, simchah is "shared happiness". In this way, Sachs' view of simchah is similar to Heschel's. Both thinkers believe that simchah cannot be achieved or expressed when an

[14] Ibid. p. 55

individual is alone.

Sachs argues that while the communal element is necessary in order for simchah to exist, simchah is in danger of being diminished in the face of communal affluence. Affluence has the ability to make a community forget where it came from and why it exists. When a community forgets to give thanks, it loses its happiness and the art of relationship. Horrible things happen when people forget to "serve God in joy and with gladness of heart." The consumer society in which modern Jews live brings temporary happiness, but not deep, lasting joy. Instead, it "leads to the manufacture and distribution of unhappiness." This is why simchah is so important to modern Jewish life. Focusing on simchah reminds the modern Jew that there is a difference between material goods and spiritual goods. Whereas the more we share material goods, the less we have, the more we share spiritual goods, the more we have. Sachs argues that simchah is renewable only when it is shared, when people come together for a common good. Simchah also does not arise from being content with the world, but comes about by successfully changing the world.[15]

Sachs draws upon Jewish traditions concerning simchah and *osher* in this address, but also breaks from these traditions in important ways. He negates the importance of rejoicing through material means, and rather focuses on the spiritual forms of rejoicing. This goes against many of the biblical, rabbinic, and post-rabbinic texts we explored above, which stress the importance of feasting and drinking in the process of simchah. It is clear that Sachs is reacting to a trend toward materialism that he sees in the modern world, but in doing so he ignores some key Jewish texts that speak of the importance of worldly goods and the

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[15] Sachs, Jonathan. *Interfaith Summit on Happiness*. Emory University, October 17, 2010. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-xfEcC2RXro

joy that arises from their consumption. He sees materialism as a threat to the Jewish community and as a force that diminishes simchah. This threat does indeed exist within the Jewish community and more broadly within Western society. Without quoting the text from m. Avot 4:1, he is putting forth the argument that one who is joyful with his lot is rich. One need not strive for more and more in order to find joy, one only needs to have enough to live. This is indeed a message that modern Jews need to hear.

The modern Musar writer, Alan Morinis, makes a similar point. He argues, "This elevated level of simplified living sets joy free in the heart...Released from craving and the relentless pursuit of more material satisfactions, perfectly content with what is, the heart bubbles forth with the joy that is its potential and natural inclination."[16] Presumably, both Morinis and Sachs are aware of the prior Jewish texts that make connections between material goods and simchah. While it may seem that they are preaching against these texts, they are actually in line with Jewish tradition. The texts we have examined that show Jews engaging in simchah through material means present Jews doing so in order to praise and thank God. These texts also present the idea that there is a limit to the joy one can experience and express through material means. In biblical, rabbinic, and post-rabbinic texts, using material goods to excess is not an appropriate way of engaging in simchah. These two modern Jewish thinkers are also speaking out against the excessive pursuit and use of material goods, and argue that these actions do not allow a Jew to engage in simchah or service of God.

A survey of relatively recent Jewish publications on the topic of simchah reveals that this is a topic that Jewish authors and movements continue to think about. In the Union for

[16] Morinis, Alan. *Everyday Holiness: The Jewish Spiritual Path of Mussar*. Boston: Trumpeter, 2008. p. 122

Reform Judaism's *Books and Music Catalog*, several titles appear with "joy" in the title or description. A book and video, each entitled *Worship with Joy – Iv'du B'Simcha,* are publications that deal with reinvigorating Shabbat worship in Reform synagogues.[17] A children's book by the name of *Come, Let Us Be Joyful!: The Story of Hava Nagila* by Fran Manushkin,[18] also appears as a publication of the Reform Movement,[19] though in this case, joy most likely is connected to *gilah* rather than to simchah. NFTY's *bencher, Birkon Mikdash M'at*, is described in the catalog as being able to "help bring joy and energy of the Reform youth movement to your home, your synagogue, your weddings, *b'nei mitzvah*, Shabbat tables, and Jewish celebrations."[20] Another publication that the Reform movement claims will add to joy in the home is *Shaarei Shabbat: Songs and Blessings for Your Jewish Home.*[21] Finally, *The Gift of Prayer: The Spirituality of Jewish Women* describes its readers as "celebrating life's joys".[22] These publications present joy as arising in many of the same ways the rabbis presented it: in worship, in song, and at specific holidays and life-cycle events.

Publications dealing with the topic of joy also appear in the *Jewish Lights Publications Catalog*. The book *Finding Joy: A Practical Spiritual Guide to Happiness* by Dannel I. Schwartz[23] conflates joy and happiness in the title and throughout the book.[24] It is a work based on Jewish mysticism, and builds on the kabbalistic traditions surrounding joy and happiness that were touched upon in this paper. It utilizes traditional kabbalistic

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[17] http://www.urjbooksandmusic.com/product.php?productid=10108&cat=0&page=1
[18] Fran Manushkin is an author and illustrator of children's books and books for young adults.
[19] *Catalog: 2009-2010.* New York: URJ Books and Music. p. 7
[20] Ibid. p. 10
[21] Ibid. p. 27
[22] Ibid. p. 28
[23] Dannel I. Schwartz is a Reform rabbi in Detroit, MI.
[24] http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-58023-009-4

teachings, such as the ten *s'firot*, but attempts to make them relevant and accessible to the modern Jew by relating them to stories of modern American life. Another book with "joy" in the title is *Life's Daily Blessings: Inspiring Reflections on Gratitude and Joy for Every Day, Based on Jewish Wisdom* by Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky.[25] Like *Finding Joy*, this book also seems to offer a guide to increasing one's joy in daily life through Jewish tradition and text. It uses both the Jewish and secular calendar as a framework for daily devotionals. A book that draws upon the Chasidic tradition, and particularly on the saying of Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav, is *The Empty Chair Finding Hope and Joy, Timeless Wisdom from a Hasidic Master, Rebbe Nachman of Breslov* adapted by Moshe Mykoff[26] and the Breslov Research Institute. Rabbi Nachman's views on simchah have been included throughout this paper, and many of them appear in this Jewish Lights publication. This publication presents many of Nachman's sayings, taken out of their original context and language for popular consumption. A particularly interesting title that appears in this catalog is Rabbi David A. Teutsch's[27] *Spiritual Community: The Power to Restore Hope, Commitment and Joy.*[28] This publication is interesting in that it examines the joy that arises through community. This is in line with the views of Jonathan Sachs and Abraham Joshua Heschel, who both see simchah as arising not when an individual is alone, but amidst a group of people. The collective rather than individual element of simchah is a point that is relevant to modern Jewish life, yet is all to often neglected.

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[25] http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-58023-396-5. Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky is the Executive Director of the Jewish Outreach Institute.

[26] http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-879045-67-5. Moshe Mykoff is an author and children's book editor.

[27] Rabbi David A. Teutsch, Ph.D. is a former President of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, and currently teaches contemporary Jewish civilization there.

[28] http://www.jewishlights.com/page/product/978-1-58023-270-8

Simchah in Mordern Jewish Life

In modern Judaism, the term "simchah" is connected much more with emotion than it perhaps was in the rabbinic period. In its colloquial usage, "joy" in a Jewish setting has become much more similar to its secular meaning - an internal state of being. Even in modern times, though, simchah has not lost the element of ritual action or performance. Many Jews know the term as referring to a joyous event in one's life or in the life of a community. Jews, for example, speak of *b'nei mitzvah*, baby namings, weddings, birthdays, and anniversaries as "*simchahs*", or if they are being grammatically correct, "*smachot*". These events are joyous and include at least some element of communal action or celebration. In a modern Jewish community, one means celebration when he uses the term simchah in this way. It is no coincidence that a popular song at many of these events is "*Hava Nagilah*", which includes in the lyrics "*v'nism'chah*", and "*b'lev sameach*".

Modern Jewish usage of meaning ritual action when using the term "simchah" is also evidenced in the holidays of Sukkot and Simchat Torah, and in the greeting one gives during any *chol ha'moed.* Sukkot is presented in the *siddur* as "*z'man simchateinu*", the time of our joy. When reading this in the *siddur*, one does so while in the act of worship. This festival in particular is filled with ritual action, including building and sitting in a *sukkah*, shaking the *etrog* and *lulav*, including prayers not recited on a daily basis in the prayer service, and marching in *hakafot* around the synagogue. The simchah associated with this festival is of the ritual type and it requires some sort of performance. During the interim days of this festival and Pesach, the normative greeting, "*moadim l'simchah*", reminds Jews that this is a

specific time in which they are commanded to rejoice and help others do so. It calls to mind the ways in which these festivals were celebrated in biblical times, which included much ritual and performance.

Simchat Torah, is a holiday whose name hearkens back to the rabbinic idea of engaging in simchah through celebrating the giving of the Torah and engaging in Torah study. In the Talmud, this holiday is only mentioned as part of Sh'mini Atzeret, but it began to take shape as a day of rejoicing in the Torah in the geonic period, in which the yearly cycle of reading the Torah became widespread within the Jewish community.[29] At almost any modern Jewish synagogue, this holiday is marked by joyous dancing and singing with the Torah. While emotional joy may be an outcome of this performance, it is clear to any Jew who attends a synagogue on this holiday that it includes expected and appropriate actions. The troubling issue in many Reform synagogues is that this holiday and its ritual expressions of simchah have largely been relegated to the youth. It seems that adults are uncomfortable with expressing joy through song and dance with the Torah on this holiday. While the youth should indeed rejoice in the Torah and at this specific time, this cannot be the only group that does so. Synagogues and Reform Jewish leaders need to do more to show adults that expressing joy in synagogue and with the Torah is not only allowed, but expected. Decorum has taken hold of the Reform Jew and has ruled since Reform Judaism began. It has done so largely to the detriment of performative simchah. The latest Reform Jewish statement of principles, which was adopted in Pittsburgh in 1999, speaks of the importance of experiencing and expressing joy on Shabbat and the festivals, stating "The Festivals enable us to celebrate with joy our people's religious journey in the context of the changing

[29] Rothkoff, Aaron. "Simhat Torah". *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

seasons."[30] Reform Jews need to be reminded that experiencing and expressing joy is commanded, it is appropriate for all ages, and it is a way in which one can encounter God and do God's will.

A similar issue exists in normative Reform Jewish Purim celebrations. This holiday, on which Jews are told to engage in simchah, usually consists of a Purim carnival aimed at children. The vast majority of Reform Jews who dress up on this holiday are children. Adults may attend the festivities, but synagogues rarely provide venues in which older youth and adults can rejoice. If synagogues do provide an adult Purim activity, it usually is centered on alcohol. While alcohol consumption is indeed one way in which Jews can engage in simchah, it is not the only way and should not be presented as such. Jewish traditions concerning proper ways to engage in simchah can serve as a guide for Reform synagogues when they plan Purim and Simchat Torah festivities. If we take Jewish tradition into account, then we will see that even in modern times it is appropriate and desirable for Jews of all ages to rejoice through song, dance, prayer, Torah study, and special meals. While these are not the only ways to engage in simchah on these joyous holidays, they are a good starting point and may open up creative, informed, and honest discussions concerning ways Jews can rejoice in modern times.

Even though the term "simchah" includes certain performative elements in modern Jewish life, there is a much greater emphasis on emotional joy when people speak of simchah. This mirrors the general trend of secular society, which places a greater emphasis on emotions and individualism than did previous generations. The trend toward necessitating romantic love in order for marriage to be acceptable is a good example of this.

[30] http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=44&pge_prg_id=4687&pge_id=1656

Before the modern period, marriage occurred much more often for economic, social, or political reasons. With the modern period came the primacy of individual emotion.[31] Since Judaism went through a parallel transformation in the modern period, and continues to transform, it is not surprising that simchah has come to refer much more often to individual emotion than to external acts and communal rituals.

The issue of engaging in simchah through sexual relations only within marriage is an interesting one to explore when speaking about modern Jewish life. There is no doubt that modern Jews engage in consensual sexual relations outside of the bonds of marriage and experience significant joy and pleasure in doing so. Despite this wide-spread practice, the Reform Movement's official stance is that it discourages premarital and extramarital sex. A responsum that was published in 1979 acknowledges that sexual relations outside of marriage have become common and that there are loose moral standards in the modern period concerning this issue. In light of this reality, the authors of this responsum recommend that Reform Jews see marital sex as the ideal and do whatever they can to "discourage casual sexual relations."[32]

However, the message is not as clear in Rabbi Eric Yoffie's 2005 sermon that he delivered at the Union for Reform Judaism's Biennial Convention. In this sermon, he speaks about the troubling trend amongst Reform Jewish teens to engage in casual sexual relations. Citing current societal realities that many Jews will not marry for fifteen years after the onset of puberty and very few parents tell their unmarried adult Jewish children to refrain from sex, he claims that "we do not tell our kids that sex before marriage is forbidden." Rather, he

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[31] Rosenthal, Erich. "Mixed Marriage/Intermarriage". *Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

[32] Jacob, Walter, Chairman. "Jewish Attitude Toward Seual Relations Between Consenting Adults", *American Reform Responsa.* CCAR Press, 1979. http://data.ccarnet.org/cgi-bin/respdisp.pl?file=154&year=arr

argues that "Jewish ethical principles that apply inside marriage apply outside of marriage as well."[33] He does, however, argue that high school students should not be engaging in sexual relations. He speaks about the need to engage in sex only when it is an expression of holiness, love and mutual respect. While Yoffie does not speak about simchah in this sermon, some rabbinic and post-rabbinic views on sexual relations and simchah echo in his words.

It should be noted that simchah is not always appropriate in modern Jewish life. Whereas b. Shabbat 30b states that the *Shechinah* does not dwell amongst sadness, but only amongst rejoicing, many modern Jews find that their relationship with and understanding of God deepen in times of sadness, hardship, or crisis. Simchah can be a way by which one experiences God, but it should not be presented to a modern audience as the only way in which one may experience God. To do so would be alienating and would run counter to much of the work Jewish communal leaders do with families in mourning, with ill congregants, or with couples attempting to heal a broken marriage. The popularity of healing services and the health and wellness movement that exists in Reform Jewish life is a testament to the fact that the *Shechinah* does indeed dwell amongst sadness and suffering. If Judaism is to remain relevant in the future, it must not only present joy as a state in which one can experience and worship God, but also must present states other than joy as appropriate for accessing the divine presence. Like the rabbis, we must realize that emotional joy cannot be forced or legally commanded. For most Jews within our communities, their primary sense of the simchah is emotional joy, so we must be careful when we call on them to be joyous and how we teach the traditional Jewish value of

[33] http://urj.org/about/union/leadership/yoffie/biennialsermon05/

simchah.

It may also be very powerful for modern Jews to study Jewish traditions concerning the lack of joy at specific times. In showing the contrast between traditional mourning rituals and traditional ways of engaging in simchah, Jewish leaders can educate modern Jews about a meaningful part of the religion. This education can then influence the ways in which Jews approach their own times of joy and times of sadness. It will allow them to use these traditional emotional outlets and will encourage them to find others that work for them as well. We learn from reading these traditional texts that acting in a certain way can have an impact on one's emotions. Thus, if an individual does not know how to mourn or how to express grief and loss, the mourning rituals can serve as a concrete guide for emotional expression. This is valuable because proper emotion expression is key to healing and to reintegration into society. Just as actions that traditionally constitute simchah can lead to a person feeling joyful, actions that traditionally constitute mourning can lead to a person's expression of grief and loss. Modern Jews need to know that there is space within Judaism and within the Jewish community to express one's own suffering. This is not counter to the religion or the culture, but is integral to them. Just as simchah is best accomplished when shared amongst a community, mourning is something that Jews should do in community. No one should feel like they need to mourn in solitude or isolated from their community.

As we saw in Jonathan Sachs' address and Dannel I. Shawartz's book, there has been a conflation of simchah and joy with other emotions or actions in modern Jewish life. Simchah meant something very specific in biblical and rabbinic times, but has become generalized in more recent times. Many Jews, even Jewishly educated Jews who know the

nuanced meanings of the Hebrew words "simchah", "*osher*", and "*oneg*", do not make a distinction in English between joy, happiness, gladness, delight, or celebration. True, there are times in ancient Jewish literature when these terms are mentioned together or as parallel terms. For the most part, though, each term meant something that the others did not. Generally speaking, the nuances of each term are nowhere to be found in modern Jewish usage. The connotation of simchah with willingness, sacrifice, and fulfilling a specific commandment has largely been lost.

Future education on the traditional meanings of simchah and the ways in which the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud, the Midrash, and post-rabbinic Jewish texts conceptualize simchah may take place on the festivals and also on Shabbat. Conversations on what brings joy to modern Jews and ways in which they express this emotion may be fruitful and enlightening. It would also be valuable to present modern Jews with the idea of "engaging in simchah". This shows that there are both emotional and performative elements within the term and the commandment.

The difficulty in implementing the rabbinic and post-rabbinic concepts of simchah in Reform Jewish life is that the rabbis saw simchah as intimately connected with *mitzvah*. The Reform Movement is one that is non-halakhic, and is a Jewish movement in which the sense of being obligated by God, by the community, or by the tradition is lacking. It is difficult for Reform Jews to see themselves as doing God's will on earth or fulfilling a commanded act when they engage in simchah. While the Pittsburgh Principles of 1999 speak of *mitzvah* as "sacred obligation",[34] it is expressing an ideal rather than the reality of how Reform Jews view obligation in Judaism and in their daily lives. Reform Judaism has more work to do on

[34] http://ccarnet.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=44&pge_prg_id=4687&pge_id=1656

this matter, and simchah should be a key part of these discussions.

The rabbis largely held the view that simchah was a combination of emotion and performance. They saw a need for Jews not only to feel simchah or act in a simchah-like manner, but to engage in simchah. In doing so, Jews could encounter God and show their willingness to serve God. Engaging in simchah meant experiencing the joy-inspiring gifts that constituted God's creation. Those gifts included material goods, loved-ones, Torah, and specific times of the week, year, and life-cycle. These gifts still exist in Jewish life, and are still appropriate vehicles by which modern Jews can engage in simchah. The need and desire to do so remains, and may even be magnified in modern Jewish life. The commandment to "rejoice before Adonai" is just as relevant now as it was when it was first uttered, and Jews will continue to heed that call in grounded, yet creative and meaningful ways long into the future.

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