

Cambridge  
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Religion and Monotheism

# Emotions and Monotheism

John Corrigan



ISSN 2631-3014 (online)  
ISSN 2631-3006 (print)



Cambridge Elements 

Elements in Religion and Monotheism

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AND MONOTHEISM

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Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

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477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
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Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781009479332](http://www.cambridge.org/9781009479332)

DOI: [10.1017/9781108980807](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108980807)

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When citing this work, please include a reference to the DOI [10.1017/9781108980807](https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108980807)

First published 2024

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

ISBN 978-1-009-47933-2 Hardback

ISBN 978-1-108-97048-8 Paperback

ISSN 2631-3014 (online)

ISSN 2631-3006 (print)

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# Emotions and Monotheism

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DOI: 10.1017/9781108980807  
First published online: April 2024

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**Abstract:** The emotional turn in scholarship has changed the way in which historians of religion think about monotheistic traditions. New histories of religion have adapted and incorporated the totalizing sensibilities of twentieth-century *annalists*, the granular view of social historians, groundbreaking philosophical investigations, and the spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration between historical analysis, anthropology, and psychology. Religion as a principal bearer of culture has shaped emotional life profoundly, just as human emotion has constituted religious life. Taking a qualified constructivist approach to emotion enables understanding of the dynamism, fluidity, and ambiguity in emotional experience, alongside continuities, and facilitates analysis of how that feeling has animated religious life in monotheistic traditions. It equally sharpens insight into how monotheistic religion itself has made emotion. Affect, emotion, and mixed emotions are three categories of feelings evidenced in monotheistic religions. Each is illustrated with respect to the similarities and differences among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

**Keywords:** monotheism, emotions, love, anger, weeping

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ISBNs: 9781009479332 (HB), 9781108970488 (PB), 9781108980807 (OC)  
ISSNs: 2631-3014 (online), 2631-3006 (print)

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## 1 Monotheism and Emotions

The emotional turn in scholarship over the last several decades has changed the way in which historians of religion think about monotheistic traditions. New histories of religion have adapted and incorporated the totalizing sensibilities of twentieth-century *annalists*, the granular view of social historians, groundbreaking philosophical investigations,<sup>1</sup> and the spirit of interdisciplinary collaboration among historical analysis, anthropological poetics, and psychological science. Some recent scholarship likewise has embraced an overlapping project, the ethical turn, with its insistence on fairness to the lives of the human subjects put under the historical microscope, and its determination to avoid flattening those lives. Arising from these backgrounds the academic enterprise of emotions research in religion has set a daunting agenda for itself, and especially so within the field of historical studies. That agenda – to critically rethink definitions of both emotion and religion and to explore their enmeshment – has found traction in research surveying major religious traditions as well as by attending to ways in which local communities constructed emotional lives within religious frameworks.

As initial forays have progressed to studies of scale, scholarship in religious history has challenged conceptions of both emotion and religion that have constrained understanding of how people feel and what religion has to do with that. The new scholarship leverages insights into each – emotion and religion – to pry open and revise shopworn classifications and conceptualizations of both. The study of religion progressively has worked in tandem with the study of emotion to generate new interpretations of how persons live religious lives, how religious institutions construct standards and expectations for behavior, and how conceptualization of feeling in all of its forms historically has been closely tied to ongoing elaborations of religious ideology and the shifting loci of power and authority in religious communities. It is clear in research that tackles both topics together that the investigation of religion has affected theorization of emotion just as research on emotion has shaped the interpretation of religion. That should not surprise. Western thinking about emotion is deeply rooted in religious ideas. The very term “emotion,” in fact, is only a recent one.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the nineteenth century, Western discourse about feeling was derived largely from theological writings. Likewise, the category “monotheism” is a comparatively recent historical

<sup>1</sup> The approach taken here is largely historical. However, it is important to recognize that philosophers have contributed substantially to reassessing the emotional in religious history. Historians, myself included, have drawn deeply on philosophical research in creating narratives. It is fair to say that philosophers such as Robert Solomon, Amelie Rorty, Mark Wynn, Douglas Hedley, Howard Wettstein, Donovan O. Schaefer, and Martha Nussbaum among recent others have had a recognizable hand in shaping historical investigation of religion and emotion.

<sup>2</sup> On the emergence of the term emotion see Thomas Dixon, “‘Emotion’: The History of a Keyword in Crisis,” *Emotion Review* 4 (2012), 338–344.

construct (like “religion”).<sup>3</sup> A focus on feeling can defeat some of the limitations of that category and enable understanding of similarities between the traditionally recognized cluster of monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) and Buddhism and Hinduism, two ancient religions that include strains that resonate strongly with aspects of the Western monotheisms.<sup>4</sup>

One way of writing about emotions and monotheism would be to construct a list of easily recognizable emotions and discuss the place of each in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Such an approach would underwhelm. Lay understandings of emotion, which seem intuitive and commonsensical, would frame such inquiry as a search for the ways in which monotheists conceive of and experience love, hate, anger, shame, grief, and so forth. Proceeding in that fashion might ensure a measure of ease and confidence among some readers as they journey into a topic with which they might be only vaguely familiar, and that is advantageous. But such an approach here would risk reinscribing on the subject matter understandings of both religion and emotion that can be problematic. The theory of basic emotions (BET)<sup>5</sup> proposes that specific emotions are hardwired in humans and occur universally. While it long has been the favored framework for academic inquiry into emotional life, recent research has complicated some of the tenets of BET, including the idea of the universality of emotions. In light of current research, it is useful to speak of a range of feelings – bodily affect, culturally constructed emotions, emotions that appear to be shared across cultures, and mixed emotions – as a portfolio of ways of feeling. In religious life, there is abundant evidence for feeling understood in that broader way. And there is much to discover about feeling by appreciating how religion has played a primary role in actively constructing it, and not just channeling or harnessing it.

<sup>3</sup> On the nineteenth-century formation of the category see Julie Chajes, “Blavatsky and Monotheism: Towards the Historicisation of a Critical Category,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 9 (2016), 247–275.

<sup>4</sup> Peter Harvey, *Buddhism and Monotheism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Silvan Tompkins’s and Paul Ekman’s basic emotions theory (BET) proposes that fear, anger, surprise and a few other emotions are “basic.” That is, they are natural kinds hardwired in the human brain and recurring in behavior because of their evolved biological and social functions. Over several decades, BET proponents built out the theory to account for more complex emotions as combinations of basic emotions, but the central claim that such emotions are natural kinds has remained foundational to BET. Constructivist theory, which in one form is known as core affect theory, as articulated by James A. Russell, Lisa Feldman Barrett, and others, rejects the claim that discrete emotions categories (fear, anger, etc.) reference natural kinds that are hardwired in humans. It offers instead a view of core affects as gauges that inform a person about the nature of their interactions with their environment. Those affects are not understood as fear, anger, and so forth but, rather, as feelings of different valences (along a spectrum of pleasant/unpleasant) and activation/arousal (along a spectrum of greater or lesser). As such, “core affect is characterized as the constant stream of transient alterations in an organism’s neurophysiological state that represents its immediate relationship to the flow of changing events.” Emotions arise through the involvement of cognition, language, and culture in the brain as it processes core affect. One place to start is Lisa Feldman Barrett, “Are Emotions Natural Kinds?” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 1 (2006), 28–58. Quote is from p. 48.



I touch on the matter of basic/constructed emotions at several points in what follows. My approach has been to draw critically upon the claim of BET for continuities from community to community alongside constructivist theories that foreground the variability of emotional life across times, spaces, and cultures.

Religion as a principal bearer of culture has shaped emotional life profoundly, just as human emotion – including in its variations over time – has constituted religious life. My purpose here, then, is not to strictly inventory emotions in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rather, it is to convey a sense of dynamism, fluidity, and ambiguity in emotional experience, alongside continuities, and to indicate how that complex has animated religious life. It equally is to offer insight into how Western monotheistic religion – in as much as it might be possible to generalize about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam using that term – itself has made emotion.

Finally, a word about definitions. To some extent, the proliferation of terms for feeling and the recent fierce debating of them has been driven by competing epistemologies and intellectual agendas across academic disciplines. That means that definitions at times can square poorly depending on which academic discourses are favored. That said, a few basic distinctions at the outset of this historical overview will be useful in getting started. *Feeling* is a catch-all term used here to refer to affect, emotion, mood, and passion. *Affect* here refers to a neurophysiological state, to embodied experience that is a composite of arousal (more/less) and valence (positive/negative) and is a nonreflective feeling. *Emotions* form immediately on the heels of affect when affects are cognitively processed, which means that language and culture are involved and cognitive appraisals are made. *Mood* is emotion that typically is temporally remote from its stimulus so that it lasts over time, and/or is feeling about nothing specific (or about everything). The term *passion* is much less a part of current academic writing than the other terms but occurs often in writings of philosophers in antiquity and in theological treatises. It is a more loaded term, generally conveying a sense of a raw and unreflective feeling that either is in a frictive relationship with reason or otherwise runs roughshod over it. It generally conveys a sense of body/mind duality.

It is impossible to comprehend the power of the major monotheistic religions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam – without recognizing the feelings of monotheists. This sortie is meant to be a pointer in the direction we should be headed.

## 2 Body and Affect

Monotheistic traditions enshrine affect as a core component of human experience and one that bridges the human to the divine. So fundamental is affect to Abrahamic theologies that monotheistic literature depicts it as a witness to the

voice of God, as the truth of scripture, as the status of the soul, and as the real. It is taken as a reliable guide to thinking and behavior. In many monotheistic communities, affect proves the existence of God, the presence of God in the world, and the full reality of an invisible world that is described in scripture but not otherwise measured in sensory perception. This section discusses how the Abrahamic religions conceive of affect, appraise its value, recognize its presence, and assign it certain kinds of roles in religious life. It addresses affect as a physiological case and offers examples of how affect as bodily sensation is mediated in monotheistic traditions. I note that specific affects – like specific emotions or blended emotions – are not confined to the traditions in which I have chosen to highlight them.

## 2.1 Judaism: Trembling and Laughing

In Judaism, the relationship of people to God is defined by ideational constructs such as covenant and chosen people, but equally by feelings that are so keen as to indicate the uniqueness and profundity of the relationship to God. In ancient Hebrew no term equates to “emotion” or “feeling,”<sup>6</sup> – the case is similar with classical Greek literature<sup>7</sup> – but narratives nevertheless convey affectual experiences through reference to bodily states and situations.<sup>8</sup> In Biblical Hebrew, emotional life is not understood as a distinct experiential category but, rather, as a matrix of bodily sensations, ritual enactments, and physical movements.<sup>9</sup> Ancient Jewish texts typically do not differentiate bodily sensations from emotions,<sup>10</sup> yet they narrate deep, transformative affectual experiences, signified by bodily changes. In one sense, then, it is true that the Hebrew Bible displays a limited interest in conventionally naming feelings.<sup>11</sup> It also is true that Judaism is rich with affect.

Centuries of debates about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity often has returned to a shorthand formula of how the two traditions stand in

<sup>6</sup> Françoise Mirguet, “The Study of Emotions in Early Jewish Texts: Reviews and Perspectives,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 50 (2019), 562, 563.

<sup>7</sup> David Konstan, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks: Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006) and “The Concept of ‘Emotion’ from Plato to Cicero,” *Méthexis* 19 (2006), 139–151: “the use of *πάθος* in classical Greek to refer specifically to emotion may have been a relatively late development - if it can be said to have occurred at all” (139).

<sup>8</sup> See Yael Avrahami, *The Sense of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012). A discussion of emotion and the senses is on pp. 163–167.

<sup>9</sup> Françoise Mirguet, “What Is an ‘Emotion’ in the Hebrew Bible?” *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016), 443.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.

<sup>11</sup> David A. Lambert, *How Repentance Became Biblical: Judaism, Christianity, and the Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

relation to each other. The theme of that formula is feeling. In one instance in the twentieth century, it was expressed cogently by Israel Zangwill in articulating “The Position of Judaism”: “Judaism aims at influencing the character through conduct, Christianity at influencing conduct through emotion.”<sup>12</sup> While such a characterization conveniently frames certain differences between Judaism and Christianity, it misses a great deal as well, and ultimately misleads. In fact, both traditions evidence rich, complex, affectual cultures. The Hebrew Bible, and much other Jewish literature and culture, reports and represents Jews experiencing affect in a multitude of ways, even if the emphasis sometimes is on physical affect rather than the identification of a specific emotion. Such reports, such as those about trembling, for example, reveal emotional valences, and also at times represent efforts to achieve a “pro-social purpose” and to differentiate the Jewish community from others.<sup>13</sup>

One pathway by which to glimpse affect in early Jewish literature is to explore the many stories wherein persons tremble before God. In the Hebrew Bible, it is the voice of God, sometimes likened to the blast of a trumpet, that causes trembling. “Let all who live in the land tremble” advised the prophet Joel (Joel 2:1). When Moses assembled the people at the foot of Mt. Sinai as God came down to meet him, they trembled (Exodus 19: 16–20; Exodus 20: 18–21). When Job reported that “trembling seizes my body,” (Job 21:6) he was describing a physical sensation elaborated by other writers. Habakkuk reported the physical sensation of God speaking to him: “I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled” (Habakkuk 3:16). Daniel confessed that God’s touch “set me trembling on my hands and knees” (Daniel 10:10). Similarly, for those who encountered God at Mt. Zion, “trembling seized them there, pain like that of a woman in labor” (Psalm 48:6), an experience of trembling coincident to that which had occurred among the throng Moses had assembled at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16–20; 20: 18–21). Women as well as men were expected to tremble: “tremble, you complacent women” (Isaiah 32:11). And when the psalmist intones “tremble before him all the earth” (Psalm 96:9), that connoted literally the earth and the heavens, and all creation. The “earth trembled and quaked” (2 Sam 22:8), even “the ends of the earth tremble” (Isaiah 41:5) and that was as it should be: “Tremble, O earth, at the presence of the Lord” (Psalm 114:7). And as with the quaking of earth and heavens, human trembling before God was

<sup>12</sup> Israel Zangwill, “The Position of Judaism,” *Contemporary Jewish Record*, December 6 (1943), 679.

<sup>13</sup> “The expression of tears, trembling, blanching, blushing, sweating, or some other physical manifestation can be understood as...displays to serve a pro-social purpose” (Angela Kim Harkins, “The Pro-Social Role of Grief in Ezra’s Penitential Prayer,” *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016), 482).

a grounding principle of religious order: “These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word” (Isaiah 66:2).

Rabbinical literature of the Babylonian Talmud and subsequent Jewish literatures carried forward the core meme of trembling, enhancing it with explanations of new kinds of trembling and an expanded population of trembling subjects. Rabbinical reinterpretation of *The Life of Adam and Eve* pictured Adam as trembling as much as weeping after having sinned.<sup>14</sup> Devils, in looking at an amulet, trembled before God.<sup>15</sup> In the thirteenth-century *Zohar*, there are such dramatic narrations of trembling that trembling itself approaches status as the grounding of “the real”<sup>16</sup> in kabbalist writing: “Then Rabbi Shim’on told him the oath that the Master of Wings had sworn. The Messiah began trembling and cried aloud. The heavens trembled, the vast oceans trembled, Leviathan trembled, and the world verged on overturning.”<sup>17</sup>

Some writers made certain distinctions. Maimonides and his son, Nagid, explored the physical sensation of trembling before God, an investigation possibly informed by the fact that Maimonides’s hands often trembled too severely for him to write. He concluded that “the prophet greatly trembles,”<sup>18</sup> but contextualized that by pointing out that trembling could happen for a variety of reasons, that sometimes people just trembled.<sup>19</sup> The expelled Jew Spinoza, an outlier in Jewish intellectual tradition but a prophetic voice in terms of his contributions to emotions theory, took that

<sup>14</sup> Yishai Kiel, “Creation by Emission: Reconstructing Adam and Eve in the Babylonian Talmud in Light of Zoroastrian and Manichaean Literature,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 66 (2015), 308–311.

<sup>15</sup> Wilfred Lawrence Knox, “Jewish Liturgical Exorcism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 31 (1938), 194.

<sup>16</sup> In broaching trembling as experience of “the real” I draw upon Jacques Lacan (Jacques Lacan, “Seminar I: Wednesday, November 14, 1962,” in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book X. Anxiety. 1962–1963*, translated by Cormac Gallagher, in *Jacques Lacan in Ireland: Collected Translations and Papers by Cormac Gallagher*) and his interpreter Jean-Luc Nancy (“Identity and Trembling,” translated by Brian Holmes, in *The Birth to Presence* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993)), 9–35. For Nancy, trembling signifies “the real” in as much as “trembling is not an image; it is the rhythm of the affected soul. . . .our community, our destiny, our Genius” (34). A key part of his discussion of textuality with regard to “the real” is on pp. 335–339.

<sup>17</sup> *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition*, Volume 1, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 24. Regarding the “Master of Wings,” Matt comments: “Apparently Metatron, the chief angel” (22n.150).

<sup>18</sup> Moses Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, trans. M. Friedlander, 2nd. ed., (New York: Dover, 1956), 235.

<sup>19</sup> For example, Moses after fleeing Egypt arrives in Midian “a trembling stranger,” and not because of an encounter with God (Maimonides, *The Guide for the Perplexed*, 240–241); Elisha Russ-Fishbane, *Judaism, Sufism, and the Pietists of Medieval Egypt* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 183; Alexander Green, “Fear and Awe in Maimonides’s Thought,” in Rachael Kohn, ed., *Fear and Faith: Christian, Jewish, and Evolutionary Perspectives* (Adelaide: ATF, 2019), 41–57; Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh 1*, Basic Principles, 4.12 in *Mishneh Torah*, trans. by Eliyahu Touger (New York: Moznaim, 1989).

argument further, writing that trembling was an insignificant accompaniment to affect, similar, in his view, to weeping.<sup>20</sup>

But in spite of such occasional historical attempts to question trembling as affect, it abided as a powerful trope within Jewish theological writing. Reinforced by widespread circulation of references to trembling before God in the New Testament, the image of the trembling Jew remained over centuries fundamental to portrayals of Jewish affectivity, so that by the twentieth century, a Jewish literary critic such as Hélène Cixous could argue that trembling was constitutive of consciousness and identity.<sup>21</sup> And the American novelist Saul Bellow could dictate that trembling was one of two core components of Jewish fiction, the other being laughter, so that “laughter and trembling are so curiously intermingled that it is not easy to determine the relations between the two. . . at times the figures of the stories, or parable, appear to invite or encourage trembling with the secret aim of overcoming it by means of laughter.”<sup>22</sup>

Like trembling, laughing, then, is another affect of historical importance in Judaism. It is referenced even in one of the grimmest narratives, that of Job: “He will yet fill your mouth with laughter, and your lips with shouts of joy” (Job 8:21). It figures prominently in the Hebrew Bible, its root (ז ח ק) signifying play and joy as well as laughter, although at times laughter is a sign of scorn or disdain, as in the references to God laughing in the Psalms.<sup>23</sup> Laughing appears early in Genesis in the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Sarah. God had promised that Sarah would be “mother of nations” but she was well past childbearing age and when informed of God’s plan for her “she laughed to herself” (Gen 18:12). The point was driven home by the narrative detail that Abraham, prompted by God, asked her why she was laughing and in response she lied and said, “I did not laugh. But he said, ‘Yes, you did laugh’”

<sup>20</sup> Spinoza wrote in “On the Origin and Nature of the Emotions” that in his investigation of emotion “I have neglected the outward modifications of the body observable in emotions, such, for instance, as trembling, pallor, sobbing, laughter, &c., for these are attributable to the body only, without any reference to the mind” (Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part III, Proposition 59, Scholium). In that he followed Seneca: “that pallor, floods of tears, sexual arousal, heavy breathing or sudden brightening of the eyes and the like, are evidence of passion and a mark of the mind, he is mistaken and fails to realize these are bodily drives” (Seneca, *On Anger* 2.3. 1-2. 4, in Anthony Arthur Long and David Neil Sedley, eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Vol. 1, *Translations of the Principal Sources with Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 419).

<sup>21</sup> Hélène Cixous, *Stigmata, Escaping Texts*, trans. Catherine A. F. MacGillivray (New York: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>22</sup> Saul Bellow, “Introduction” in Bellow, ed., *Great Jewish Short Stories* (New York: Dell, 1965), vii.

<sup>23</sup> “God’s laughter and mocking are borrowed from some late passages (Psalms xxxvii 13 and lix 8 and Job ix 23, where it is explained more fully). . . . The verb חקק which originally meant ‘to play,’ ‘to make sport’ in Hellenistic times acquired the meaning ‘to laugh,’ replacing חקק. The verb לִשְׂרֹא ‘to mock’ does not occur before the exile” (Marco Treves, “Two Acrostic Psalms,” *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965), 84).

(Gen 18:14–15).<sup>24</sup> Sarah’s own understanding of that event bespoke a seemingly ontological principle: “God has made me for laughter” (Gen 21:6). In that sense it is possible to suppose that “Sara laughed with her innards. . . a belly laugh.”<sup>25</sup>

Philo followed Stoic and Epicurean understandings in constructing laughter as a joyful spiritual state.<sup>26</sup> In mishnaic literature, the *Ketubot* has a rabbi explain: “If one dies laughing, it is a good sign for him.”<sup>27</sup> Presumably that was because, as the well-worn phrase from Ecclesiastes intoned, it was “a time to laugh” (Eccles. 3:4). Depictions of laughing (in moderation, a caution echoing down through the centuries to Maimonides and later<sup>28</sup>) were baked into mishnaic narratives as ways of moving the story forward, and even as representations of acceptable audience response to explication of holy texts, so that study of Torah “makes a person laugh to the last day.”<sup>29</sup> A story involving Rabbi Akiva has him spontaneously laughing at the sight of a fox scurrying from the Holy of Holies in the aftermath of the destruction of the Second Temple, because such “laughter in the ruins of Jerusalem” confirms to him a hopeful prophecy of Zechariah.<sup>30</sup>

Jewish writings affirmed that such laughter came from the spleen. The Tractate Berachoth informed that “. . . the kidneys prompt, the heart discerns, the tongue shapes [words], the mouth articulates, the gullet takes in and lets out all kinds of food, the windpipe produces the voice, the lung absorbs all kinds of

<sup>24</sup> Relevant discussion is in Don Seeman, “‘Where Is Sarah Your Wife?’ Cultural Poetics of Gender and Nationhood in the Hebrew Bible,” *Harvard Theological Review* 91 (April 1998), 103–125; Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych compares the Quranic version of the story with the biblical, pointing out how the theme of Sarah’s renewed menstruation is worded in the former as “laughter” and in the latter as “moisture” (“Sarah and the Hyena: Laughter, Menstruation, and the Genesis of a Double Entendre,” *History of Religions* 36 (1996), 13–41.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Phil Korsak, “God’s Laughter,” in Sabine Bieberstein, Kornelia Buday, and Ursula Rapp, eds., *Building Bridges in a Multifaceted Europe: Religious Origins, Traditions, Contexts and Identities* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 168. For a Christian theological take on the laughter of God see Jan Martijn Abrahamse, “Appropriate Divine Laughter: Psalm 2’s Theological Gesture for a Comic Theology Proper,” *Journal of Reformed Theology* 15 (2021), 185–207.

<sup>26</sup> Catherine Hezser, *Rabbinic Body Language: Non-Verbal Communication in Palestinian Rabbinic Literature of Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 232.

<sup>27</sup> *Ketubot*, Chapter 12, 103b, *The William Davidson Talmud*, [www.sefaria.org/william-davidson-talmud](http://www.sefaria.org/william-davidson-talmud).

<sup>28</sup> “A Man shall not be full of laughter and mockery, nor sad and mournful, but joyful” (Moses Maimonides, “Laws Concerning Character Traits,” in *The Ethical Writings of Maimonides*, translated by Roslyn I. Weiss and Charles E. Butterworth (New York: Dover, 1983), 33). Lydia Amir notes that in “*On the Management of Health*, he advises against the excess of joy through a story that illustrates that one can die of excessive joy following an increase in laughter and frivolity” (“‘Pure Joy’: Spinoza on Laughter and Cheerfulness,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 58 (2020), 518).

<sup>29</sup> Hezser, 234.

<sup>30</sup> Sidra DeKoven Israhi, “After Such Knowledge, What Laughter?” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14 (2001), 290–291. “‘Mesahek,’ the word that designates Akiva’s (Akiba’s) comic response, variously translated as ‘to be merry’ or ‘to be cheerful’ as well as the act of laughter itself, is etymologically connected to the emotion with which both Abraham and Sarah greeted the annunciation of Isaac’s birth, and by which the son of their old age was subsequently named” (291).

liquids, the liver is the seat of anger, the gall lets a drop fall into it and allays it, the spleen produces laughter, the large intestine grinds [the food], the maw brings sleep and the nose awakens.” The Midrash (*Ecclesiastes Rabbah*) confirmed, as did the *Zohar*, that “the spleen produced laughter in young children.” The twelfth-century writer Judah Halevi explained in *The Book of Kusari* that “the spleen is called laughing because it is its nature to cleanse both unclean and obscuring matter. If they are pure, cheerfulness and laughter arise.”<sup>31</sup> At the same time, laughter was cast in Talmudic writing as ambiguous. It was something that came quite perceptibly out of the “innards” but its meanings were not fully known.<sup>32</sup> Laughter was affect that sprung from the guts.<sup>33</sup>

Spinoza was a strong advocate for laughter, polemicizing against Christian reasoning that forbade it as subversive of ascetic ideals.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, in the judgment of one scholar, Spinoza penned “the most important defense of laughter ever formulated.”<sup>35</sup> In later centuries, Jewish laughter became more closely entwined with a certain kind of humor that built on irony that had always been present in Jewish stories (scriptural and otherwise). That humor, as response to oppression, became more apparent in the nineteenth century and especially after the Holocaust.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that such “Jewish humor is not merely a reaction and response to circumstances and environment but a product of Jewish experience, and is almost as old as the Jewish people itself.”<sup>37</sup>

## 2.2 Christianity: Pain and Emptiness

Pain is a subjective experience, and is both sensory and affective.<sup>38</sup> Pain affect is a matter of arousal, of “changes in action readiness caused by the sensory experience of pain. This arousal is often distressing or frightening and can lead

<sup>31</sup> All quotations on the spleen are from Fred Rosener, “The Spleen in the Talmud and Other Jewish Writing,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 46 (1972), 82–83.

<sup>32</sup> Hezser, 232–237.

<sup>33</sup> This does not mean that religious groups, or other groups, could not install regulations meant to dampen it. For the case of Mormon restriction of laughing see Douglas J. Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion: Hope, Reciprocity, and Otherness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 56–60.

<sup>34</sup> Spinoza, *Ethics*, IVP45C2S.

<sup>35</sup> Amir, “‘Pure Joy’: Spinoza on Laughter and Cheerfulness,” 501.

<sup>36</sup> Avinoam Patt, “‘Laughter through Tears’: Jewish Humor in the Aftermath of the Holocaust,” in Eli Lederhendler, ed., *A Club of Their Own: Jewish Humorists and the Contemporary World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 113–131.

<sup>37</sup> Israel Knox, “The Traditional Roots of Jewish Humor,” *Judaism* 12 (1963), 327.

<sup>38</sup> Pierre Rainville, “Brain Mechanisms of Pain Affect and Pain Modulation,” *Current Opinion in Neurobiology* 12 (2022), 195. Another way to speak of this is to say that pain is affect integrated with cognition (Shackman, A., Salomons, T., Slagter, H. *et al.* “The Integration of Negative Affect, Pain and Cognitive Control in the Cingulate Cortex,” *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 12 (2011), 154–167).



to interference in daily activities.”<sup>39</sup> Pain affect is complex. It cannot be tied exclusively to tissue damage, or other kinds of explicit bodily damage or sensation, and only distantly can be related to pain intensity (but not entirely independent of it).<sup>40</sup> One way of understanding pain affect is to consider how “a reciprocal relation exists between pain and affective states.”<sup>41</sup> They are entwined, and just as a specific behavior such as trembling signals affect, so can pain, even if it is prompted by implicit processes. Pain affect can be involved in the construction of an emotion, as the complex and extremely rapid collaboration of brain, nerves, and organs builds from the bits and pieces of phenomenological experience, culture, language, and personal history a recognizably emotional state. But pain affect is not in itself equal to an emotion. Pain, in essence, “is another concept with which you make meaning of physical sensations” and it is constructed by the brain, whether it is acute or chronic, through processing involving the same neural pathways as emotion.<sup>42</sup> Diverse individuals and communities can conceive of it in varied fashions, describe it in unique ways, and make different uses of it.

Pain affect has defined the experience of the Christian since at least the time of Paul. Given that “the centrality of pain to Christianity is of overwhelming importance,”<sup>43</sup> it is not difficult to recognize in every era and in every community a discourse about pain that is fundamental to community life, religious practice, and theologizing, and to appreciate that for all Christians, pain affect is a way of identifying as Christian. “Pain and Christianity appear to belong together,”<sup>44</sup> and that linkage is manifest in a multitude of ways. From its beginnings, Christianity “represented the human self as a body in pain, a sufferer,”<sup>45</sup> a development with roots in an ancient Roman discourse about pain.<sup>46</sup> Pain affect has been fully incorporated into conceptions of Christian life

<sup>39</sup> Michael Von Korff, Mark P. Jensen, and Paul Karoly, “Assessing Global Pain Severity by Self-Report in Clinical and Health Services Research,” *Spine* 25 (2000), 3142.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 3144.

<sup>41</sup> Pierre Veinante, Ipek Yalcin, and Michael Barrot, “The Amygdala between Sensation and Affect: A Role in Pain,” *Journal of Molecular Psychiatry* 1 (2013), 9–10.

<sup>42</sup> Lisa Feldman Barrett, *How Emotions are Made: The Secret Life of the Brain* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2017), 208.

<sup>43</sup> Esther Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages,” *Science in Context* 8 (1995), 53.

<sup>44</sup> Christoph Marksches, “Pain and Christianity,” *Pain* 21 (2007), 347.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 2002), 2.

<sup>46</sup> Susanna Elm, “Roman Pain and the Rise of Christianity,” in Susanna Elm and Stefan N. Willich, eds., *Quo Vadis Medical Healing: Past Concepts and New Approaches* (Berlin: Springer, 2009), 41–54. L. Stephanie Cobb has proposed that pain was “a problem to be solved” rather than an experience to be embraced and martyrologies offered glimpses of another world where pain was absent (157). But it nevertheless was a problem that afflicted all early Christians, and was presented otherwise, as Cobb shows, in a number of key texts (i.e., *The Passion of Perpetua and*



and community, and historians have tracked that process to the earliest texts, so that currently, “a scholarly consensus has emerged that sees pain and suffering as the representation of the way in which Christians understood their collective self: a suffering body. Thus, pain – specifically the endurance of it – stands as a central interpretive focus for constructions of Christian social identity.”<sup>47</sup> Indeed, “such studies variously show that pain played a central role in forming the ancient self and in constructing a distinctive identity among Christians, even in fostering the ‘rise of Christianity.’”<sup>48</sup>

The background for early Christian identification with pain was in the philosophers, and especially in Stoicism, where “‘anguish or sorrow’ (ὀδύνη) was defined as painful grief and bodily pain as a ‘penetrating and sharp grief’ (ὀδύνη δὲ λύπη εισδύνουσα καὶ ὀξεῖα).” For Galen, pain was “‘the overwhelming affection’ (ἀθρόου παθήματος) that destroyed the continuity of a sensory body.” For many of the philosophers, there was “a keen awareness of the physicality of emotional states as well as of the psychic repercussions of bodily impairment.”<sup>49</sup>

Similar conceptions are found in Paul’s thinking.<sup>50</sup> Paul approached pain in ways suited to the context of his audience, sometimes offering “hope” as a “cure for pain,” and at times tending to a view akin to the Johannine lesson: “You will have pain but your pain will turn into joy” (John 16:20). For Paul, pain was a catalyst for Christian community that was realizable “by making new meaning of that pain.”<sup>51</sup> Moreover, with regard to the individual, Paul made pain the foundation for “a new concept of the ‘self as sufferer.’” In thinking about how “pain [λύπη] according to God brings repentance that leads to salvation and is not to be regretted, but worldly pain brings death” (2 Cor 7:10), Paul fashioned “a novel Christophoric therapy that did not seek to banish pain or extirpate the

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*Felicitas, The Letters of the Churches of Vienne and Lyons*). It accordingly remained central to the development of Christian identity even if in some cases the message was one of pain overcome. See Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Paul Middleton, Review of L. Stephanie Cobb, *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts* in *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 26 (2018), 502.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Crislip, “Pain, Emotion, and Identity in Early Christianity,” *Journal of Early Christian History* 12 (2021), 3, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Antigone Samellas, “Public Aspects of Pain in Late Antiquity: The Testimony of Chrysostom and the Cappadocians in their Graeco-Roman Context,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 19 (2015), 262. Samellas observes: “It is indicative that from Hippocratic times till late antiquity the words that refer to bodily pain, ἄλγος, πόνος, ὀδύνη, λύπη, δῆξις, also denote psychic pain. In Stoicism ‘anguish or sorrow’ (ὀδύνη) was defined as painful grief and bodily pain as a ‘penetrating and sharp grief’” (ὀδύνη δὲ λύπη εισδύνουσα καὶ ὀξεῖα) (262).

<sup>50</sup> On Paul’s indebtedness to Stoic thinking about pain but also his departures from it see Larry L. Welborn, “Paul and Pain: Paul’s Emotional Therapy in 2 Corinthians 1.1–2.13; 7.5–16 in the Context of Ancient Psychagogic Literature” *New Testament Studies* 57 (2007), 547–570.

<sup>51</sup> Crislip, 14.

emotions, but which embraced pain and its attendant affections as a strange, new path to psychic wholeness.”<sup>52</sup>

Later, Gregory of Nazianzus, John Chrysostom, and Gregory of Nyssa contributed substantially to “the transformation of the ancient pedagogy of pain into a life-long martyrdom [that] brought the Christians closer to the suffering body.”<sup>53</sup> The first of those writers “understood pain as an ontological category: as a disposition inherent to human nature,”<sup>54</sup> and “connected chronic pain with the divine,”<sup>55</sup> making it an identifying aspect of the Christian life, so that Christians “must willingly undergo Christ’s passion, in which continuous pain purified the person who experienced the pain.”<sup>56</sup> He wrote: “the nails are sweet, even though painful. For to suffer for and with Christ is more to be desired than a life of ease with others.”<sup>57</sup>

Such a view served as the springboard for a pervasive Christian culture of pain, so that “the spiritual climate of late medieval Europe was steeped in the experience of the cross, down to its most minute particulars.”<sup>58</sup> There emerged a “Christocentric religiosity of the Later Middle Ages, centered on pain.”<sup>59</sup> Women mystics such as Mechthild of Magdeburg,<sup>60</sup> Margery Kempe,<sup>61</sup> and Julian of Norwich reported their suffering in imaginatively reliving the crucifixion. The fourteenth-century English writer Richard Rolle, in meditating on the passion of Christ, offered thanks to Christ for every pain he received, while Henry Suso prayed to Christ that “I may follow you in your passion and carry my sufferings in such a way that I should be crucified with you in order to rule eternally with you.”<sup>62</sup> Suso’s reports of his pain were foundational to his Christianity, so that “for Suso’s readers the mystic experience was imbricated

<sup>52</sup> Welborn, 548, 570. Katherine M. Hockey builds directly on Welborn’s approach to Pauline thinking about emotion in *The Role of Emotion in 1 Peter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

<sup>53</sup> Samellas, 262. <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 276.

<sup>55</sup> Lauriene Zurhake, “Chronic Pain and Illness: Pain and Meaning: Interpreting Chronic Pain and Illness in Greco-Roman Antiquity,” in Christian Laes, ed., *Cultural History of Disability in Antiquity* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 63.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. Samellas writes: “Christianity brought about a de-ritualization and democratization of the ancient pedagogy of pain which amounted to a life-long martyrdom” (279).

<sup>57</sup> Cited in Samellas, 278.

<sup>58</sup> Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages,” 60.

<sup>59</sup> Esther Cohen, *The Modulated Scream: Pain in Late Medieval Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 210.

<sup>60</sup> Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> Germane discussion is in Santha Bhattacharji, “Tears and Screaming: Weeping in the Spirituality of Margery Kempe,” in Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley, eds., *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 229–241.

<sup>62</sup> Cohen, *The Modulated Scream*, 128, and Suso cited in Cohen, “Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility,” 60.

in an affective network embedded in an embrace of pain and suffering.”<sup>63</sup> The stigmata of St. Francis of Assisi became a symbol to Christian practice, which has included, in different parts of the world up to the present day, the Easter Week custom of persons in Latin cultures volunteering their bodies to suffer physically on crosses. More recently, the stigmata suffered by various Catholic women and men has played an important role as examples of “victim souls” who variously manifested their “intimate relationship with the passion of Jesus.”<sup>64</sup>

There is an aspect of Christian mysticism in many such incidences of pain reportage.<sup>65</sup> But pain by no means has been limited to ascetics or mystics. It has been an expected and often sought-after feature of piety throughout Christian history. It is present in the Catholic determination to “offer it up” when the body experiences pain, a perspective also prevalent in Protestantism – as, for example, in the processual pain involved in the evangelical experience of being “born-again” with a new identity – and in Orthodoxy as well, where a long tradition of asceticism involving pain has informed Christian practice “beyond the monastery walls.”<sup>66</sup> It may be the case that intensifying pain is positively related to growth in belief,<sup>67</sup> and equally that pain can be mingled with pleasure.<sup>68</sup>

If we view “pain as a component of affective spirituality”<sup>69</sup> central to Christianity, we can see as well how a feeling of emptiness also is present as

<sup>63</sup> Christine Marie Libby, “Mythical Assemblages and the Translation of Affect,” (PhD. dissertation, Indiana University, 2016), 44.

<sup>64</sup> Paula M. Kane, *Sister Thorn and Catholic Mysticism in Modern America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

<sup>65</sup> On pain in religion generally see Ariel Glucklich, *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Discussion of varieties of pain-oriented piety in the history of Christianity are in Franjo Mijatović, “(In)active God—Coping with Suffering and Pain from the Perspective of Christianity,” *Religions* 12 (2021), 8; Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Caroline Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991); Maureen Flynn, “The Spiritual Uses of Pain in Spanish Mysticism,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64 (Summer 1996), 257–278; Robert Mills, *Suspended Animation: Pain, Pleasure, and Punishment in Medieval Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2005).

<sup>66</sup> Patrick Lally Michelson, *Beyond the Monastery Walls: The Ascetic Revolution in Russian Orthodox Thought, 1814–1914* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2017).

<sup>67</sup> Kurt Gray and Daniel M. Wegner, “Blaming God for Our Pain: Human Suffering and the Divine Mind,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 14 (2010), 8. Trust in God does “not thrive in times of plenty but in times of pain” (11).

<sup>68</sup> An example is Charlotta Carlström, “Spiritual Experiences and Altered States of Consciousness—Parallels between BDSM and Christianity,” *Sexualities* 24 (2021), 749–766. Ex-nun Karen Armstrong wrote of her body after whipping it: “the discipline seemed to have roused it to a new life, touching something in me that left me frightened, tingling, and alert. (*Through the Narrow Gate: A Nun’s Story* (London: Flamingo, 1997), 173–174).

<sup>69</sup> Marla Carlson, *Performing Bodies in Pain: Medieval and Post-Modern Martyrs, Mystics, and Artists* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 27.

affect. For Christian mystics and ascetics, the interrelationship of pain and longing was central to their piety, Henry Suso reporting his experience of “painful longing for God,” and Margery Kempe relating how, in her words, “she wept, sorrowed, and cried, as if she would have died, for the love and desire she had to be with Our Lord.”<sup>70</sup> The late fourth-century bishop Nemesius of Emesa had defined desire (alongside pain) as affect,<sup>71</sup> and the “desire for God” was a linchpin of medieval monastic orders that followed.<sup>72</sup> For St. Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, “the desire for God is the result of the ontological distance between humanity and God,” a separation so vast that it is immeasurable.<sup>73</sup> That was a way of saying that a vexatious feeling of emptiness was a permanent aspect of Christian affectivity. Anselm of Canterbury’s “extreme need and desire for God” was felt as a pain prompted by the invisibility of God: “Lord, if you are not here, where will I search for you, being absent?”<sup>74</sup>

The feeling of emptiness typically is defined in psychological studies as “negative affect.”<sup>75</sup> In Christian theological terms, it is the outcome of a process to “empty the self of self.”<sup>76</sup> It is related to the desire for God. And it is related to pain, but is distinct from it. Christians from the earliest times cultivated a feeling of emptiness, preparing the soul to be filled by God. Emptiness made room for God in the soul and emptiness equally inflamed the desire for God. Christians made themselves feel empty, actively and intentionally prompting affect that they believed was beneficial to their spiritual advancement. In the language of a contemporary evangelical theologian, they embraced the notion that “cultivating an attitude of perpetual emptiness brings with it a perpetual fullness.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, edited by W. Butler-Bowden (New York: Devin-Adair, 1944), 181.

<sup>71</sup> Chris L. de Wet, “Nemesius of Emesa on Desire, Pleasure, and Sex,” *Religion and Theology* 28 (2021), 217.

<sup>72</sup> Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961).

<sup>73</sup> Klaas Bom, “Directed by Desire: An Exploration Based on the Structures of the Desire for God,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 62 (2009), 139.

<sup>74</sup> Quoted in Eileen C. Sweeney, *Anselm of Canterbury and the Desire for the Word* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 120. The desire for God, born of a sense of emptiness, was recognized by Aquinas, whose *Summa* has been read as a caution against the influences of affect, but who understood longing for God to be a core component of Christian experience, writing, in fact, that “(o)ur sins against God are also and always sins against our deepest desires,” namely, the desire to be with God (Quoted in Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 242). See also Thomas F. Ryan, “The Love of Learning and the Desire for God in Thomas Aquinas’s Commentary on Romans,” in William S. Campbell, Peter S. Hawkins, and Brenda Deen Schildgen, eds., *Medieval Readings of Romans* (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 101–114.

<sup>75</sup> David Klonsky, “What Is Emptiness? Clarifying the 7th Criterion for Borderline Personality Disorder,” *Journal of Personality Disorders* 22 (2008), 418–426.

<sup>76</sup> Ellen G. White, *God’s Amazing Grace* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1973), 230.

<sup>77</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Acts: The Church Afire* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1996), 35.

Christians have endeavored to cultivate the affect of emptiness through various physical disciplines. The Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches throughout their existence have set aside in the liturgical calendar numerous occasions for fasting. The experience of persons who engaged in such fasting – and that meant virtually all Christians up until the Reformation – was the experience of feeling empty. And even after the Reformation, Protestant churches remained invested in cultivation of a feeling of emptiness, Calvin consolidating encouragement of fasting with holy affection: “with a full stomach our mind is not so lifted up to God that it can be drawn to prayer with a serious and ardent affection.”<sup>78</sup>

Fasting emptied the stomach of food, and weeping emptied the body of tears. Silence emptied the mouth of words. Work emptied the body of sweat, in keeping with the monastic adage, *laborare est orare*: to work is to pray. All such exercises cultivated affect that signaled both the absence of God and the longing for God.<sup>79</sup>

### 2.3 Islam: Awe and Pleasure

Muslim religious practice involves the affects of awe and pleasure. The two are related in Islam but each has its distinguishing features. Beginning with awe, it is useful to bear in mind that while it once was overlooked in psychological and humanities research, it currently “has become one of the crucial issues in psychology.”<sup>80</sup> Recent discussion has been wide-ranging and generative, so that “across disciplines, theorists agree that awe involves being in the presence of something powerful, along with associated feelings of submission. Awe also involves a difficulty in comprehension, along with associated feelings of confusion, surprise, and wonder.”<sup>81</sup> It has a long history in theological investigation, the academic study of religion, and in anthropology. That includes R. R. Marett’s address to the British Anthropological Society in 1899 in which he proposed that “of all English words Awe, is, I think, the one that expresses the fundamental religious feeling most nearly.” He added that in his observations of religion “the emotions of awe, wonder, and the like, wherein

<sup>78</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, translated by L. Battles, Vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1241–1242.

<sup>79</sup> Discussion in John Corrigan, *Emptiness: Feeling Christian in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

<sup>80</sup> Alice Chirico and Andrea Gaggioli, “Awe: ‘More than a Feeling,’” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 46 (2018), 274. For a listing of recent psychological research on awe see pp. 274–275. See also Kirk Schneider, “The Resurgence of Awe in Psychology: Promise, Hope, and Perils,” *The Humanistic Psychologist* 45 (2017), 103–108.

<sup>81</sup> Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt, “Approaching Awe, a Moral, Spiritual, and Aesthetic Emotion,” *Cognition and Emotion* 17 (2003), 303.

feeling would seem to have outstripped the power of ‘natural,’” were crucial to religious notions of transcendence and renewal.<sup>82</sup>

Marett’s views about awe were reinforced by Rudolf Otto who likewise advanced discussion of “the unique character of religious awe,” affirming that “Marett comes within a hair’s breadth of the matter.”<sup>83</sup> The anthropologist Birgit Meyer has refocused some of that previous thinking in emphasizing the physical dimension of awe, among other feelings reported by religious persons.<sup>84</sup> In Muslim studies, a number of recent investigations touching on awe have provided evidence for the centrality of the body, and its visceral, spontaneous, affective processes.<sup>85</sup>

In the Qur’an, piety and devotion are grounded in awe: “Only they are true believers whose hearts fill up with awe when the name of God is mentioned” (Qur’an 8:2). God is the only God and commands awe: “He is the One and Only God: hence, of Me, of Me alone stand in awe!” (Q 16:51). Often in the Qur’an a message is addressed to those who “stand in awe of God.” And that awe sometimes means not actually standing, but in fact falling down in awe, so that “intentional surrender, pursuit of closeness, and awe-filled love define an experiential ideal of Muslim faith.”<sup>86</sup> Awe is noticeable, especially, in the Qur’an in “emotional plots”<sup>87</sup> and in the *sīra* (Muslim biographies of Muhammad) and other hagiographies as “awe narratives,”<sup>88</sup> where depictions of bodily experiences of persons signal the affect of awe. For example, a meeting between Moses and God is narrated as a case of awesomeness leading to Moses falling down in a faint: He said, “‘You shall not see Me; but behold the mountain—if it stays fast in its place, then you will see Me.’ And when his Lord

<sup>82</sup> Robert Ranulph Marett, *The Threshold of Religion* (London: Methuen, 1909), 13, 11.

<sup>83</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John W. Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926), 15.

<sup>84</sup> Birgit Meyer, “How to Capture the ‘Wow’: R. R. Marrett’s Notion of Awe and the Study of Religion,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22 (2016), 7–26; and Meyer, “Media and the Senses in the Making of Religious Experience: An Introduction,” *Material Religion* 4 (2008), 124–134.

<sup>85</sup> Shahzad Bashir, *Sufi Bodies: Religion and Society in Medieval Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011); Christiane Gruber, *The Praiseworthy One: The Prophet Muhammad in Islamic Texts and Images* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2018); Scott Kugle, *Sufis and Saints’ Bodies: Mysticism, Corporeality, and Sacred Power in Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Zhuo Chen, Nima Ghorbani, Paul J. Watson, and Naser Aghababaei, “Muslim Experiential Religiousness and Muslim Attitudes toward Religion: Dissociation of Experiential and Attitudinal Aspects of Religiosity in Iran,” *Studia Religiosa* 46 (2013), 42.

<sup>87</sup> Karen Bauer, “Emotion in the Qur’an: An Overview,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 19 (2017), 1–30. The discussion of emotional plots is pp. 16–22.

<sup>88</sup> Stephanie Yep, “Emotion and Islamic Hagiography: A Post-taxonomic Approach,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 34 (2022), 16.



disclosed Himself to the mountain, He made it crumble; and Moses fell down swooning” (Q 7:143).

The story of Joseph in *Sūrat Yūsuf* (Q 12) depicts a similar instance of awe. Joseph’s brothers had left him for dead after Joseph was cast into a well. He is rescued and returns to his family, who are stunned by his reappearance. His parents, who had become despondent over their loss, fall down in awe upon realizing their beloved son is alive. As Susan Bauer has noted, “Joseph’s parents here have the emotional reaction of falling down. The root used here for falling (kh-r-r) is the same as that used to describe Moses falling when he saw the mountain crumble in Q. 7:143 (kharra Mūsā ṣa‘iqan).”<sup>89</sup> The Qur’an also illustrates how even nature, like humans, falls down in awe of God: “for, behold, there are rocks from which streams gush forth; and, behold, there are some from which, when they are cleft, water issues; and, behold, there are some that fall down for awe of God” (Q 2:74). In many narratives, when persons encounter Muhammad, they fall down, tremble, sweat, and experience other bodily sensations out of awe.<sup>90</sup>

Al-Ghazali wrote that awe was one of the six requirements for faithful prayer, and, quoting Uqba ibn Muslim wrote: “At no moment is man closer to God, Great and Glorious is He, than when he sinks down in prostration” in prayer.<sup>91</sup> A particular form of falling down – prostration in prayer – is a “typically Islamic. . . expression of awe,” but it has a history in Asia and in Greek antiquity as well.<sup>92</sup> In the Middle East as well as further east “it has signaled awe and submission.”<sup>93</sup> Islam, which means “submission,” cultivates awe, representing it in literature and art, as well as in public performances that foreground “spontaneous reactions such as weeping, pallor, trembling, sweating, and fear.”<sup>94</sup>

Literary depictions of awe are supplemented by the material culture of Islam. Muslim artists provided visual depictions of nature and the divine/human cosmos that were meant to inspire awe in those who viewed them. Zakariya ibn Muhammad al-Mahmud al-Qazwini’s *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existing Things*, alongside *The World-Showing Glass* of Ahmad al-Tusi, were two such medieval illustrated texts from Iran whose “aim was quite deliberately to instill awe and wonder about God’s creation in the reader’s

<sup>89</sup> Bauer, “Emotion in the Qur’an,” 19.   <sup>90</sup> Yep, 15.

<sup>91</sup> Al-Ghazali set forth six requirements (“internal prerequisites”) for perfecting prayer: Awareness, understanding, reverence, awe, hope, and shame (*Inner Dimensions of Islamic Worship*), translated from the *Ihyā* by Muhtar Holland (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 1983), 38–39, 26.

<sup>92</sup> Oddbjorn Leirvik, “Prostrate and Erect: Some Christian-Muslim Reflections on Religious Body Language,” *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 16 (2016), 30. “In the New Testament, the corresponding Greek verb to the Hebrew *hiṣṭahawāh* is *proskúniēn*, which means throwing oneself down in awe. The verb *proskúniēn* is used almost as many times in the New Testament as the verbal root s-j-d in the *Qur’an*” (33).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*   <sup>94</sup> Yep, 21.

mind.”<sup>95</sup> Qazwini’s presentations of wonders such as stars, the body, and the bee are intentionally extravagant: “His point is that these induce awe in anyone who takes the trouble to contemplate them”<sup>96</sup> and to “cumulatively and gradually induce an experience of awe at the divine order of creation.”<sup>97</sup> Arab travel writing, which recounted extraordinary experiences among those who visited foreign lands, and especially Europe, such as in Mirza Abul Hasan Khan’s nineteenth-century “Book of Wonder,”<sup>98</sup> also prompted awe. It is notable that the Arabic genre of the “wonder-tale” often took the form of a narrative involving such a “culture-crossing,”<sup>99</sup> alongside its relation of spectacular natural events or sites. Muslims for their part deliberately built their own wonders – such as amazing moving statues – deliberately to prompt awe in ambassadorial delegations and other visitors.<sup>100</sup>

Another affect important in Islam is pleasure. In twenty-first-century psychological research, pleasure has come to be conceptualized as a core characteristic of some affect. Pleasure affect itself is a physical sensation, and can be of various types. In Islam it often is recognized as bodily affect, as feeling that, like pain, trembling, or desire, is raw and insistent. In Islam, as in other monotheistic religions, there is a range of thinking about pleasure, its manifestations, its appropriateness to a situation, and how it is prompted, cultivated, and circumvented. Much discussion of pleasure is embedded in debates about the relation of mind and body. For many Muslim writers that has amounted to a fraught project of estimating the connections and disjunctures between physical pleasure and “intellectual” or “spiritual” pleasure.

In the Qur’an, the root for pleasure (r-ḍ-w) occurs 73 times. That is a more frequent occurrence than the combined references to anger, hatred, and laughing.<sup>101</sup> In many instances, there are multiple layers of meaning. Much of

<sup>95</sup> Stefano Carboni, “Review of Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011),” *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture* 19 (2012), 319.

<sup>96</sup> Persis Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 23.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>98</sup> Naghmeh Sohrabi, (*Taken for Wonder: Nineteenth-Century Travel Accounts from Iran to Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012)) discusses how Arabs reacted with awe to the astonishments of Europe (33). Persis Berlekamp points out that Tusi had written in 1388 that “Man has no greater pleasure than to contemplate what he has never seen before: this desire is realized by travelers” (quoted in Berlekamp, *Wonder, Image, and Cosmos in Medieval Islam*, 26).

<sup>99</sup> Christine Chism, “Memory, Wonder, and Desire in the Travels of Ibn Jubayr and Ibn Battuta,” in Nicholas Paul and Suzanne Yeager, eds., *Remembering the Crusades: Myth, Image, and Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 29.

<sup>100</sup> Terrance M. P. Duggan, “Diplomatic Shock and Awe: Moving, Sometimes Speaking, Islamic Sculptures,” *Al-Masaq: Islam and the Medieval Mediterranean* 21 (2009), 229–267. See especially p. 232.

<sup>101</sup> Bauer, 3.





**Figure 1** The Angel Michael, from Qazwini's *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence*. Wasit, Iraq, 1280. Munich, Bayerische Saaatsbibliothek, MSS cod. arab. 464, fol. 33b.

the discussion of pleasure in the Qur'an is about the "pleasure of God," a term that exemplifies such layered meanings. The Qur'an exhorts Muslims to seek "the pleasure of God." In most discursive contexts that means submitting, behaving, and feeling in ways that draw one closer to God. It also implies that God feels pleasure, and, as many Muslim writers have argued periodically, that God desires humanity should feel pleasure as well. The pleasure experienced by those who stand in the "pleasure of God" might even consist in the deepest and most profound pleasure of "seeing God."<sup>102</sup>

Persons experience the pleasure of God in relation to the long arcs of their lives as well as in the daily rituals that mark time in increments. On the granular

<sup>102</sup> Pieter Coppens, *Seeing God in Sufi Qur'an Commentaries: Crossings between This World and the Other World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018). Chapter 5 (pp. 174–200) focuses on the vision of God in theology and Sufism.



**Figure 2** The wonder of the bee. The bee is awesome for its fragility according to Qazwini. *The Wonders of Creation and the Oddities of Existence*. Fars, Iran. Istanbul, Süleymaniye Library, MSS Yeni Cami 813, fol. 175b.

level, “in prayer, a person feels inner happiness, peace, and comfort, and that Allah is pleased with him or her.”<sup>103</sup> That is, a person feels the pleasure of piety as the pleasure of Allah. Over a lifetime, a person endeavors to build a practice of virtue and obedience to the law, with an eye to the afterlife, to Jannah, where there is transcendent pleasure, as God and a person are brought together in the garden: “Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of Eden underneath which rivers flow, wherein they dwell for ever. Allah hath pleasure in them and they have pleasure in Him. This is (in store) for him who feareth his Lord” (Q 98:8). In paradise, the dynamic of mutuality implied in the pleasure of Allah and the Muslim whose life is pleasing to God is fully disclosed and realized. The good Muslim sees God in paradise and has pleasure, while God reciprocally sees a person build that good life and takes pleasure in that: “And the likeness of those who spend their wealth in search of Allah’s pleasure, and for the strengthening of their souls, is as the likeness of a garden on a height. The rainstorm smiteth it and it bringeth forth its fruit twofold. And if the rainstorm smite it not, then the shower. Allah is Seer of what ye do” (Q 2:265).

The affect of pleasure is welcomed among Muslims and cultivated, and sometimes understood as a component of play.<sup>104</sup> Al-Ghazali was especially articulate about the pleasures of play in the body – for instance, his trust that

<sup>103</sup> Abdel Nasir Yousuf Abde and Kahree Salih, “The Literature of Happiness ‘with Reference of the Philosophy of Happiness in Islam,’” *Journal of Islamic Studies and Culture* 3 (2015), 183.

<sup>104</sup> A discussion of this is in Ghazwan Ali, “Pleasures of the Body: Theological and Philosophical Deliberations,” *Annales Islamologiques* 48 (2014), 161–183. See paragraphs 49–51.

music was an excitation of yearning for God. Ibn Taymiyya, writing two centuries later, reinforced the claim that pleasure was “an essential part of one’s existence.”<sup>105</sup> For Ibn Taymiyya, pleasure was dependent on sensation but was not reducible to it. And that pleasure could be found in a range of earthly indulgences, including music, song, and food. For Miskawayh, whose thinking about pleasure was somewhat more restrictive, pleasure nevertheless was requisite to the recuperation and inspiration of the soul.<sup>106</sup> Some pleasures, such as alcohol, were proscribed.

In Sufism, the pursuit of pleasure could be a pathway to God. That understanding is evidenced, for example, in Sufi ecstatic dancing, with its energetic spinning over hours at a time; sensual poetry, such as that of Rumi, for whom *‘ishq* (love) itself could be physical pleasure;<sup>107</sup> and prose renderings attributed to Rabi’a and to those identified as witnesses to her life. In the South Asian Sunni saint al-Hujwiri’s eleventh-century *Unveiling of the Hidden*, the first full-scale manual of Sufism, sensory organs are linked with spiritual faculties so that spiritual pleasure is like the pleasure of wine, in which taste, sight, smell, touch, and hearing (when a host vocally offers drink) all are joined in an experience of gratification that is something more than the sum of the component parts.<sup>108</sup> There is deep pleasure in listening to the recitation of the Qur’an.<sup>109</sup> For Sufis there also is affirmation for some measure of indulgence in sexual pleasure in connection with spirituality. Such has been in keeping with a tradition attributed to the Prophet: “The marital coitus leading to pleasure is equivalent to alms . . . When spouses make love, God looks at them, full of kindness.”<sup>110</sup> More pointedly with regard to sex, there is the example of the beliefs of some young men and their Muslim clerical mentors (not necessarily Sufis), including in the twenty-first century, who have dreamt of being rewarded as martyrs in the afterlife (a reward that is not their only motivation<sup>111</sup>) with seventy-two female

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraphs 38–39.

<sup>106</sup> M. Abdul Haq Ansari, “Miskawayh’s Conception of Sa’adah,” *Islamic Studies* 2 (1963), 328.

<sup>107</sup> Amira Eran, “Al-Ghazali and Maimonides on the World to Come and Spiritual Pleasures,” *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 8 (2001), 139. The physical and sensual are prominent: “Music is the meat of all who love/Music uplifts the soul to the realms above,” are lines from Rumi’s poem, “Remembered Music” in *Rūmi: Poet and Mystic (1207–1275)*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1956), 32.

<sup>108</sup> Al-Hujwiri quoted in Eyad Abauli, “‘I Tasted Sweetness, and I Tasted Affliction’: Pleasure, Pain, and Body in Medieval Sufi Food Practices,” *The Senses and Society* 17 (2022), 61, 56, 57.

<sup>109</sup> The nature of such pleasure is explained in Navid Kermani, *God is Beautiful: The Aesthetic Experience of the Qur’an* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018), 320–345.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Abdessamad Dialmy, “Sexuality and Islam,” *The European Journal of Contraception & Reproductive Health Care* 15 (2010), 161. Citation: Nawawi ME. Al Arbai’n al Nawawia. Tunis: Taftatzani Editions 1877: 25th hadith

<sup>111</sup> Nerina Rustomji, *The Beauty of the Hourai: Heavenly Virgins, Feminine Ideals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 13–42.

virgins for their sacrifice in the name of *jihad*.<sup>112</sup> In picturing paradise in such a way, “Islam offered materiality: the promise of a physical world where one could live a physical life filled with sensation.”<sup>113</sup>

While al-Ghazali and Miskawayh stopped short of the lush sensual piety of some Sufis, they believed that bodily pleasure could amount to spiritual pleasure in the right circumstances. They represented a broader understanding among Muslims that “pleasure has been found to be a good that God bestowed onto his creation. This is why Muslim theologians encouraged seeking pleasure, as God intended for life to be lived and experienced with its pleasures.”<sup>114</sup>

For Ghazali, “pleasure is a good and a perfection,” and earthly pleasures pointed to heavenly ones.<sup>115</sup>

To experience the affect of pleasure, then, was to live a life of interwoven bodily, intellectual, and spiritual pleasures; to feel the pleasure of profound connection with God and equally to strive to live in a way that placed one in “God’s pleasure.” In Muslim thought, recognition of the phenomenology of pleasure typically was joined to theological analytics that ordered experience as idealized, abstracted, and morally weighted. There has been considerable variation in Muslim thinking about exactly how those two sides of Muslim experience of pleasure are related. Many Muslim communities remain inclined to a theology of intellectual and spiritual pleasure as superior to bodily pleasure, even as others explore how intellectual and spiritual pleasures are themselves constituted as physical pleasures.

### 3 Emotion, Ritual, and Identity

The body processes affect in conjunction with cognitive components and cultural information to yield emotion. Context is paramount in the formation of an emotion out of affectual experience. Trembling in one context might lead to the emotion of fear, while in another it results in joy. Pain might result in

<sup>112</sup> A *tasfir* on Sura 55 comments: “It was mentioned by Daraj Ibn Abi Hatim, that Abu Al-Haytham’Abdullah Ibn Wahb narrated from Abu Saïd al-Khudri, who heard the Prophet Muhammad PBUH saying, ‘the smallest reward for the people of heaven is an abode where there are eighty thousand servants and seventy-two houri, over which stands a dome decorated with pearls, aquamarine and ruby, as wide as the distance from al-Jabiyyah to San’a’” (Sunan Al-Tirmidi, Vol. 4, Book 12, 1262). Translation by Konrad Harasim, “Suicide Terrorism as a Tool of Modern War – from an Explosive Belt to Superterrorism,” *Artykuly Naukowe* 9 (2017) 98. See also Rustomji, 84, citing Al-Tirmidhi, *al-Jami’ al sahih*, 4:2356.

<sup>113</sup> Rustomji, 161. <sup>114</sup> Ali, “Pleasures of the Body,” paragraph 50.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 36. Eran, “Al-Ghazali and Maimonides on the World to Come and Spiritual Pleasures,” 137–138. Miskawayh was more conservative (Ahmad ibn Muhammad Miskawayh, *The Refinement of Character: A Translation from the Arabic of Ahmad ibn-Muhammad Miskawayh’s Tahdhīb al-akhlaq*, translated by Constantine K. Zurayk (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1968), 8).

sorrow or melancholy, but it also might result in delight. Awe in some cases can lead to fear, while in others it might be constructed as surprise. In some cases, affects can result in mixed emotions, an aspect of emotional life discussed further on in this study.

In this section, I address two emotions that are central to monotheistic traditions: love and anger. While there is overlap in the way Judaism, Christianity, and Islam construct those emotions, there are important differences as well. Moreover, within each tradition there has been a process of change over time, in which various emphases have waxed and waned as communities adapted to changing circumstances of social life and culture. The point here is to consider through a few examples how emotions are constructed differently in different times and places and to understand something of the similarities and differences among monotheistic traditions through that appreciation of variable construction. In addition, it is important to recognize how ritual shapes human affect through inculcation of discipline and habit in people, and how ritual accordingly is centrally involved in the construction of emotions. People live in “emotional communities”<sup>116</sup> that can differ significantly one from another and in which emotions take shape as social performances. Socially shared expectations for the expression and concealment of emotion are encoded in rituals that govern how, when, and why persons cry, laugh, get angry, grieve, and display other feelings.<sup>117</sup>

### 3.1 Love in Christianity

Christianity long has been called by its adherents a “religion of love.”<sup>118</sup> Both Islam and Judaism have made that claim as well.<sup>119</sup> Christians over centuries have grounded their faith in scriptural verses and foundational theological writings that bespeak the love of God for creation, the love of humanity for God, and the love of people for each other. Of particular importance for Christians has been the attributed New Testament author John, the “disciple whom Jesus loved,” and whose phrasings about love have echoed loudest in the

<sup>116</sup> Two useful starting points attentive to medieval and early modern communities are Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2006) and Andrew Lynch, “Emotional Community,” in Susan Broomhall, ed., *Early Modern Emotions* (London: Routledge, 2016), 41–44.

<sup>117</sup> A starting point is the section, “Concepts and Theories,” the first six chapters in Axel Michaels and Christoph Wulf, eds., *Emotions in Rituals and Performances: South Asian and European Perspectives on Rituals and Performativity* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>118</sup> A recent articulation of this claim is Miroslav Volf, “A Religion of Love,” *Nova Prishtina* 12 (2014), 458–471.

<sup>119</sup> David Nirenberg and Leonardo Cappezone, “Religions of Love: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” in Adam J. Silverstein, Guy G. Strousma, and Moshe Blidstein, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Abrahamic Religions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 518–535.

ears of the faithful: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (John 3:16) and, in John’s reportage of Jesus’s last prayer, “the world does not know you, but I know you; . . . I made your name known to them [the disciples], and I will make it known, so that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:25–26). In John’s words, Jesus goes to his death because of God’s love for humanity: “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). That love is transmitted to humanity (John 17:26) and becomes a principle for human community: “since God loved us so much we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:12). The love between the Father, Son, and humanity is the love of a family, the *familia Dei*,<sup>120</sup> love that is lived daily, as described by Paul: “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor 13:4–7).

The fostering of the emotion of love within the early Christian community took place in conjunction with the “love feast.” Love was taught and inculcated, modeled and refined in that ritual. It had deep roots in meal culture in the ancient world, mimicking the essential features of Greco-Roman scripts for group dining. It was an event that unfolded over several hours of eating and drinking in which persons, according to protocol, conversed and shared food, and then, led by an acknowledged president, offered a libation, in a special enactment that excluded servants and other persons who were not recognized members of the community.<sup>121</sup> The primitive Christian community built identity through the ritual, which was one of many practical means by which a constructed emotion of Christian love coalesced. Because “the meaning inherent in practice, including ritual practice, helps generate and sustain an identity that is replete with emotion,”<sup>122</sup> the love feast played a central role in the construction of a Christian self-understanding grounded in the enshrinement of love. Over

<sup>120</sup> Dirk G. Van der Merwe, “The Christian Spirituality and the Love of God: Conceptual and Experiential Perspectives Emanating from the Gospel of John,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 41 (2020), 1–10.

<sup>121</sup> Hal Taussig, “In the Beginning was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009); Dennis Smith, *From Symposium to Eucharist: The Banquet in the Early Christian World* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003); Matthias Klinghardt, *Gemeinschaft und Mahlgemeinschaft: Soziologie und Liturgie Frühchristlicher Mahlfeiern* (Tübingen: Francke, 1996).

<sup>122</sup> Douglas James Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion: Hope, Reciprocity, and Otherness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 66. See also Jonathan Mercer, “Feeling Like a State: Social Emotion and Identity,” *International Theory* (2014), 515–535; John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).



time, the depiction of the relationship between God and humanity, and of humans' responsibilities to each other, all of which are imagined to be grounded in love, has changed as the geographical, social, and intellectual contexts of Christian life have shifted.

Christians made the profession and performance of love an identity. And they did so in order to differentiate themselves from Jews and pagans. They constructed love in ways that suited their aims to establish their own community as witness to the superior, salvific power of their god. Paul criticized his opponents in Galatia as Judaizers who remained observant of Jewish ritual laws (Gal. 2:11–14). The Gospel of Matthew extended that antipathy in portraying a Jesus who spoke against limiting the expression of love to one's community, a rhetorical jibe at Jews whom the nascent Christian community could cast, misleadingly, as a group that loved merely their religiously likeminded neighbors but hated their religious others: "ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy: but I say unto you, Love your enemies and pray for them that persecute you" (Matt. 5: 43–44). Such a captious slant on Jewish emotionality was "part of a sectarian strategy through which Jesus's teachings were presented as the perfection and fulfillment of a flawed law that came before."<sup>123</sup> The message of loving one's enemies remained strong and Christianity deployed it to differentiate from Muslims as well as Jews. A translation of the Qur'an commissioned by the thirteenth-century Archbishop of Toledo Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada portrayed a Muhammad who had "decided that the law of the Gospel was too difficult, since it enjoined love of one's enemy and spurning the pleasures of the flesh."<sup>124</sup>

Early Christian writers distanced themselves from the pagan philosophers by emphasizing *agape* – a word that appears over 100 times in the New Testament – over *eros* (passionate love) and the Aristotelian notion of *philia* (friendship between equals), which appear zero and one time, respectively. Early Christians emphasized a reciprocal love between humanity and God that was a condition for human community. That love came "out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned" (1 Tim 1:5). The proper object of love, for Christians, was God, but also one's neighbor, and, eventually with Augustine, love was constructed as a kind of altruistic *caritas*, a *human* emotion that manifested human will joined to God (and was opposed to *cupiditas*, or purely carnal love),<sup>125</sup> but that nevertheless was enmeshed with

<sup>123</sup> Nirenberg and Cappezone, 519.

<sup>124</sup> John V. Tolan, *Saracens: Islam in the Medieval European Imagination* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 183.

<sup>125</sup> Augustine was deeply indebted to the philosophers for this way of thinking about concupiscence. A discussion of pagan influences focusing on *amor*, *caritas*, and *bona voluntas* is

love as a *divine* gift. Augustine conceptualized *caritas* as a bridge between pagan *eros* and Christian *agape*, a scheme in which human will remained active (as in *eros*) alongside a basic self-denying *agape*. While there were Neoplatonic influences that helped to shape Christian anxieties about the flesh, Christian *agape* in itself was not an impediment to sexual expression. Later polemical interpretations of Christian concepts of *agape*, by both Muslims and sectarian Christians, sometimes had more to do with intergroup parrying as each party endeavored to construct an emotional identity distinct from the other.

The Reformation witnessed much politically driven rethinking of love. Prior to the religious revolutions of the sixteenth century, there was a period of evolution in love literature, and especially during the twelfth century. During that period, Christian writers more frequently wrote about love in connection to marriage, which they increasingly (but by no means universally) began to see as “a free consent between two partners. . . . It is not sexual congress that characterizes marriage but love. . . . Consent supposes liberty.”<sup>126</sup> All of that led to incremental escalation in the celebration of married love, and a reframing of thinking about love relationships, which would come to fruition during the Reformation. Luther rejected the notion that celibate priests were a special class of Christians, so he married, and then went on to challenge the Augustinian notion of *caritas* as an emotion that informed faith and guided a person to God (*fides charitate formata*). Luther objected, arguing that love was a consequence of faith, and the Christian had the liberty to choose God.<sup>127</sup> That claim was fundamental to the emergence of Protestantism generally, because it was tied to the basic criticism that Roman Catholic power and control was grounded in a doctrine good works. The emotion of love – for one’s neighbor as well as for God – accordingly was constructed in Lutheranism and some other branches of Protestantism as an experience that was authentic in the wake of faith.<sup>128</sup>

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Gillian Clark, “Augustine on Love and Fellow Feeling,” in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World* (New York: Oxford, 2016), 209–225.

<sup>126</sup> Jean Leclercq, *Monks on Marriage: A Twelfth-Century View* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982), vii, 18.

<sup>127</sup> Regarding freedom to choose see Martin Luther, *On the Freedom of a Christian* (1520).

<sup>128</sup> Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (c. 397); Martin Luther, *Lectures on Galatians* (1531/1535). In the wake of the English translation of Swedish Protestant theologian Anders Nygren’s influential *Agape and Eros: The Christian Idea of Love* (translated P. S. Watson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953; o.p. 1930/1936)) scholars long took *eros* and *agape* as different conceptualizations of love, both in the ancient world and in the history of Christianity. See Nygren, 1953, 31). Recent scholarship in the history of religion, classics, and theology has challenged that distinction. See Torstein Theodor Tollefsen, “Eros and Agape - A Critique of Anders Nygren,” and John Kaufman, “Anders Nygren’s Agape and Eros, Iranaeus, and the Essence of Christianity,” in *Love: Ancient Perspectives*, ed. by Kari Grødum, Henry Fiskå Hägg, John Kaufman and Torstein Theodor Tollefsen (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2021), respectively 17–30, 31–48; Tuomo Mannermaa, *Two Kinds of Love*:



That rendering of love proved central to the emotional experience of Protestants. Love for a spouse like love for God included a definitive religious component. In Protestantism and eventually as well as in Roman Catholicism, that idea became a standard part of theologizing about faith, love, and marriage, as well as a guide to social relations with others more generally.

Christian theologizing about love of God (as in Judaism and Islam) interwove discourse about the angry God with the figure of the loving and forgiving God. The anger of God, a theme inherited from Judaism, was well-ensconced in Christian understanding. But it was the relationship between God's anger and God's love that so much occupied Christian theologians from Paul down to the present, and the reason for that, in part, is that Christians sought religious models for their own emotionality and especially for their performance of love in difficult circumstances that otherwise might call for less benevolent feelings. Augustine thought that God's meting out of punishment was not always in line with how a loving figure would act, while Gregory of Nyssa asserted that divine punishment was always the expression of the love of God.<sup>129</sup> For Luther, the love of God as "pure love" (*etel liebe*) and the wrath of God were tenuously intertwined.<sup>130</sup> It was a problem that marked Calvin's theology as well, although the Lutheran idea of "pure love" did not find a home in Calvin's theorizing about religion and emotion. But it did occupy the imagination of the Lutheran Justitia Sengers (fl. 1585) author of *From the Holy Ghost's Description of the Suffering and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, by a Maiden Who Was Born Blind*, who wrote of the "hearty, burning, and fiery love" of God and imagined "even God's punishment as loving in intent rather than born of his rage."<sup>131</sup>

In the wake of the Reformation, Catholics and Protestants alike crafted images of a loving God that brought forward compassion, gentleness, and

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*Martin Luther's Religious World*, translated and edited by Kirsi I. Stjerna (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010); Antti Raunio, "Martin Luther and Love," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.013.333>.

<sup>129</sup> St Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. Robert W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20.9; 21.15; 22.21–4, 30; Gregory of Nyssa, *An Address on Religious Instruction*, in Edward Hardy, ed., *Christology of the Later Fathers*, trans. Cyril C. Richardson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1954), 284. For an example of how the question remained in debate see Jordan Wessling, "How Dies a Loving God Punish? On the Unification of God's Love and Punitive Wrath," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19 (2017), 423–443.

<sup>130</sup> Fredrik Brosche, *Luther on Predestination: The Antinomy and the Unity between Love and Wrath in Luther's Concept of God*. Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Doctrinae Christianae Upsaliensis, no. 18 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell), 1978.

<sup>131</sup> Senger quoted in Susan C. Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 227.

even cheerfulness. In European Christian visual culture, the pained look of a dying Christ gave way to depictions of calm gazes and approachability.<sup>132</sup> That development extended the Christian “new emotionalism”<sup>133</sup> in picturing a body of Christ that fostered mourning alongside awareness of “the rosy-cheeked ideal of beauty in Christ’s complexion even in death.”<sup>134</sup> It was an image of a Jesus to mourn but also to love, and by whom to feel loved.

Further along, in eighteenth-century Methodism, the sacrifice of Jesus remained important, but imaginings of the love of Jesus increasingly came to characterize Methodist meetings. The “love feast” became the centerpiece of Methodist community worship, as it had been in many Orthodox and Coptic Christian communities for centuries. According to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, Christianity was “the law of love,” so that “Love is the end of all the commandments of God. Love is the end, the sole end, of every dispensation of God, from the beginning of the world to the consummation of all things.”<sup>135</sup> For Methodists, Jesus was present at such feasts (which were occasions distinct from Communion Sunday) as a loving protector and guide.

### 3.2 Love in Judaism

The Jews against whom early Christians attempted to push off were not as some Christian communities depicted them when it came to emotion. Again, it is important to bear in mind that the vocabulary of ancient Hebrew did not include a term customarily used to identify “emotion” or “feeling” and “it is doubtful that the language has such a category, at least in the modern understanding.”<sup>136</sup> Accordingly “‘emotion’ does not exist as a category in the Hebrew Bible,”<sup>137</sup> at least as a free-standing abstract. Hebrew roots associated with attachment, sexual activity, bodily repulsion, joyous exclamation, fearful shuddering and some other experiences all are used as means of conveying information about emotive moments. As such, the language frames emotional experiences as physical and sometimes ritual experiences, and not as static, abstract states. In other words, there is little reason to expect ancient Hebrew texts to depict “basic emotions” in the way that Paul Ekman and proponents of basic emotions theory

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 65–72.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas F. Mathews, *Byzantium: Antiquity to the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 124.

<sup>134</sup> Myrto Hatzaki, *Beauty and the Male Body in Byzantium* (New York: Palgrave, 2009), 70.

<sup>135</sup> John Wesley, “The Law Established through Faith. Sermon 36: Discourse 2,” Section II, paragraph 2, in *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 2, Sermons 34–70*, edited by Albert C. Outler (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 38.

<sup>136</sup> Mirguet, “The Study of Emotions in Early Jewish Texts,” 562.

<sup>137</sup> David A. Lambert, “Mourning Over Sin/Affliction and the Problem of ‘Emotion’ as a Category in the Hebrew Bible,” in F. Scott Spenser, ed., *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions: Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2017), 140.

have constructed that expectation based on their twentieth-century contemporaneous fieldwork.<sup>138</sup> A study of love in Deuteronomy accordingly notes that “we moderns tend to privatize emotions including love, creating a discrete category of feeling (as distinct from action) to which we assign love. The success of this modern conception of love is such that we are not wholly aware of its tendency to distort our efforts to understand love in earlier periods,”<sup>139</sup> during which love was more overtly a matter of ritual, behavior, and politics. One insight arising from that is that the Hebrew Bible evidences little intent to narrate the “inner feelings” of its actors, and instead represents love as “a *social relationship*, a proximity between two beings,” an event that occurs “on the borderline of two beings.”<sup>140</sup>

Early Jewish texts depicted emotional life as actors’ physical manifestations of affect, situated in narrative settings that conveyed a sense of why such manifestations are occurring. They emphasized the body, the pragmatic, and the peculiar context of the event. The physicality of love – the bodily and behavioral aspects – were key, so that love that was narrated, for example, as ritual gift-giving “expressed itself by the radiance of the face and the alacrity with which the action was performed.”<sup>141</sup>

That said, words for specific feelings such as love, fear, and anger all are present in early Jewish literature. And love in Judaism, as has been the case in Christianity, has been fundamental to the construction of Jewish identity. God’s love for Israel is an emotional attachment that is not based on prior events that would beget it. That is, there is no prior relationship of exchange, obligation, or

<sup>138</sup> Jacqueline E. Lapsley writes: “So powerful is the modern conception of emotion as a feeling existing in the inner world of the autonomous individual that it is difficult to maintain the discussion outside the categories generated by that conception” (“Feeling our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65 (2003), 357–358).

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>140</sup> David A. Lambert, “Refreshing Philology: James Barr, Supersessionism, and the State of Biblical Words,” *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016), 350, 352. See also Susan Ackerman, “The Personal is Political: Covenantal and Affectionate Love (’Ā HĒB, ’AHĀ BĀ) in the Hebrew Bible,” *Vetus Testamentum* 52 (2002), 438–458; Abraham Malamat, “You Shall Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: A Case of Misinterpretation?” in E. Blum et al. (eds.), *History of Biblical Israel: Major Problems and Minor Issues*, (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 401–405. Ellen Van de Wolde has proposed that love is understood not only as a matter of a relationship between persons but that the relationship is hierarchical; for example love is the love of a man *for* a woman, not *between* them. (“Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible,” *Biblical Interpretation* 16 [2008]: 1–24).

<sup>141</sup> Yochanan Muffs, “Love and Joy as Metaphors of Willingness and Spontaneity in Cuneiform, Ancient Hebrew, and Related Literatures: Part I, Divine Investitures in the Midrash in the Light of Neo-Babylonian Royal Grants,” in idem, *Love and Joy: Law, Language and Religion in Ancient Israel* (New York/Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1992) 122–123. Gary A. Anderson stresses ritual over affect in Hebrew Bible depictions of joy (*A Time to Mourn, A Time to Dance: The Expression of Grief and Joy in Israelite Religion* [University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991]).

obedience involving God's love for Israel. However, Israel is commanded to love God, to return God's love through obedience to the law. The commandment "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:5, NJPS) is grounded in legal obligation, the requirement "to act lovingly and loyally toward Him."<sup>142</sup> Such culturally defined "covenantal love,"<sup>143</sup> however, need not be construed as affectless, and recent scholarship has offered some ways in which to observe how texts referencing love (אהב) attend to a range of actions and feelings that include sexual attraction and the irresistibility of love in addition to social obligation and ritual. Love was an emotion in which both men and women were active as loving agents,<sup>144</sup> and their participation in "Jewish ritual practice did not only affect the ways in which Jews acted but also how they *felt* about their Jewishness and their connection to the wider culture."<sup>145</sup> Love was in some measure a ritual experience involved in the shaping of identity.

To love as a Jew was to practice an emotional experience that was wrapped up in Jewish habits of everyday life and to engage Jewish tradition about the love of God as covenantal love rooted in a "conception that is modeled upon the loyalty owed by a vassal to his suzerain."<sup>146</sup> Love was framed in transactional relationships so that "Yahweh's love for Israel, and the imperative necessity of Israel's love for Yahweh in return"<sup>147</sup> structured the experience of love as a conjoining of legal and affective elements, in matters involving God and also in love between humans.<sup>148</sup> Love was both legal calculation and affect, and human love for God an act of obedient service, but an act of feeling as well.<sup>149</sup> Marriage between a man and a woman – a congeries of feelings and obligations – was analogous to the relationship of God to Israel, as in the *Song of Songs*<sup>150</sup> (where a love term occurs greater than once every hundred words).<sup>151</sup> If one way of

<sup>142</sup> Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: JPS, 1996), 7.

<sup>143</sup> William J. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25 (1963), 77–87.

<sup>144</sup> Ronit Nikolsky, "'To Love' in the Bible: A Cognitive-Evolutionary Approach," in Ronit Nikolsky, Istvan Czachesz, Frederick S. Tappenden, and Tamas Biro, eds., *Language, Cognition, and Biblical Exegesis* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 85.

<sup>145</sup> Ari Mermelstein, "What Did It Feel Like to Be a Jew? The Kosher Food Laws and Emotional Norms among Ancient Jews," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 53 (2022), 344.

<sup>146</sup> Ari Mermelstein, "Love and Hate at Qumran: The Social Construction of Sectarian Emotion," *Dead Sea Discoveries* 20 (2013), 248.

<sup>147</sup> Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," 77.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>149</sup> Jon D. Levenson, *The Love of God: Divine Gift, Human Gratitude, and Mutual Faithfulness in Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 90–142.

<sup>151</sup> John D. Mayer, "Emotion over Time within a Religious Culture: A Lexical Analysis of the Old Testament," *Journal of Psychohistory* 22 (1994), 241.

talking about emotion and Judaism is to say that “Judaism requires emotional involvement and emotional transactions with God,”<sup>152</sup> then the *Song of Songs* is a blueprint for emotional transaction involving love. And that transaction was a matter of material relations – the physical performance of duty and obligation – conjoined with spiritual feeling. Midrash subsequently avoided abstracting love from its behavioral components, so that “when the Rabbis read the Song of Songs, they do not translate its ‘carnal’ meaning into one or more ‘spiritual’ senses; rather, they establish a concrete, historical moment in which to contextualize it.”<sup>153</sup> Love was practice.

Just as Jewish dietary laws made a distinctive Jewish culture, so did Jewish emotional culture serve to mark boundaries between Jews and other groups. In fact, those two constructive enterprises – food culture and emotional culture – were conjoined and deployed as identity markers against out-groups, so that “disputes about how to understand the emotions that animate the dietary laws were attempts to define the power relations between Jews and the surrounding world.”<sup>154</sup> Teachers of Jewish law – dietary and otherwise – accordingly sought “to teach Jews how to *feel* Jewish. . . to *feel* their Jewish identity.”<sup>155</sup> Jews felt disgust at foods that were abominable under the law, and they felt joy at sharing meals with other Jews – who also felt disgust at what was *trayf*. Shared feelings about food reinforced awareness of boundary and deepened identification with the community.

The ritual activities advised and proscribed in the commandments were derived from the dictum to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 6:5). That commandment, which rabbis<sup>156</sup> eventually made the foundation of the daily praying of the *Shema*, determined that by not lying or stealing, by honoring one’s parents and keeping the Sabbath holy, a person enacted love for God. It is love tintured with gratitude, and its expression drew upon ritual forms ingrained in Jewish collective self-understanding. In ancient Judaism, “the love of God is both legal and relational: legal, because it requires and describes specific mandatory behaviors, and relational, because those behaviors flow not from some abstract, universal moral code, philosophical proposition, or process of nature but from

<sup>152</sup> Robert A. Eammons, “Emotion and Religion,” in Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, eds., *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York: Guilford, 2005), 247.

<sup>153</sup> Daniel Boyarin, “‘This We Know to Be the Carnal Israel’: Circumcision and the Erotic Life of God and Israel,” *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992), 498. He writes: “For Rabbinic Judaism, the Song of Songs is the record of an actual, concrete, visible occurrence in the historical life of the People, Israel” (497–498). For discussion of emotional transaction in Christianity see Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century*.

<sup>154</sup> Ari Mermelstein, “What Did It Feel Like to Be a Jew? The Kosher Food Laws and Emotional Norms among Ancient Jews,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 53 (2022), 344.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 346. <sup>156</sup> *Mishnah Berachot* 1 :1–3.

a particular – and very personal – relationship, the experience the two parties have had of each other and the expectations that it elicits.”<sup>157</sup>

Talmudic scholarship debated whether and how love could be “the foundation of a system of ethical and even legal obligation.”<sup>158</sup> The issue remained volatile for centuries. The philosopher Bahya ibn Paquda, prompted by concerns that Jews were becoming overly focused on the formal observation of Jewish law, wrote *Duties of the Heart* (c.1050) to summon Jews to a more intensely emotional religious practice. Drawing on Neoplatonic and Sufi ideas, he advised that love of God was more than “the duties to be performed by the parts of the body.”<sup>159</sup> He foregrounded connections between the body, the senses, and feeling in proposing that emotions made actions meaningful. Maimonides likewise emphasized love of God as that which informs reverent and religiously purposeful action. He proposed meditation on the wonders of creation and the intellectual majesty of God as a pathway to cultivating love of God. The Aragonian halakhist and philosopher Hasdai Crescas (d. 1411) stressed love as the essential, defining feature of God, and that love was distinct from intellect (and more closely related to will). He accordingly urged that the path of spiritual improvement was not through rational knowledge but through love of God. His theorization of divine and human love took shape in the context of his effort to refute Christianity in apologetic (*Refutation of the Christian Principles* [1398]) and to fashion a Jewish identity different from Christianity (this in the midst of severe persecution of Jews in Spain).<sup>160</sup>

At the start of the twentieth century, Jewish theologians and writers stressed altruism, justice, empathy, and giving (especially as in philanthropy) as behaviors that comprise a life lived loving God. The relational, and sometimes transactional, aspect of love remained paramount in Judaism, alongside discussions and debates about God as pure love and human capability to experience that love. But discussion increasingly centered as much on the quality of love as on its obligations and benefits. Much of that discussion, which eventually took a postmodern turn, was grounded in the theological writing of Franz Rosenzweig, who placed love at the heart of his religious philosophy, framing

<sup>157</sup> Levenson, 59–60. <sup>158</sup> Nirenberg and Cappezone, 522.

<sup>159</sup> Bahya ibn Paquda, *Guide to the Duties of the Heart* (c. 1050), cited in Marla Segol, *Kabbalah and Sex Magic: A Mythical-Ritual Genealogy* (State College: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2021), 93.

<sup>160</sup> On the persecution see “Hasdai Crescas: Portrait of a Leader at a Time of Crisis,” in Jonathan Ray, ed., *The Jew in Medieval Iberia, 1100–1500* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 309–351; Levenson, *The Love of God*, Chapter 4, “The Consummation of the Spiritual Life,” 143–179; Hasdai Crescas, *The Refutation of the Christian Principles*, translated and with an Introduction by Daniel J. Lasker (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992).



it as a matter of God's relationship with the holy community, in which God returns to Jews the love they offer to him. At the same time, Rosenzweig proposed that such a relationship was a central theme of the *Song of Songs*, a book of the Old Testament that broached love in vividly erotic and romantic terms, foregrounding its powerful and personal affective content and its "grammar of eros," an experience "between sensual and heavenly love."<sup>161</sup>

Rosenzweig's characterization of love brought forward the quality of love alongside its relation to law and liturgy. Rosenzweig affirmed the singularity and uniqueness of the individual, and God's love for the individual,<sup>162</sup> a view that differed from his mentor Hermann Cohen's argument that God did not love individual persons.<sup>163</sup> Subsequent twentieth-century writers, including fiction writers such as Isaac Bashevis Singer, advanced Jewish thinking about love further in that direction. Its development can be glimpsed in the display of love between persons and for God in *The Slave* (1962), Singer's tale about the blossoming love between a Jew and his master's daughter, Sarah, in seventeenth-century Poland. Singer narrated their love as a matter of inbetweenness – transcendent and abstract but personal and erotic – as they explored it and attempted to live it within a Jewish framework of law and ritual. In the end, "although the love of Jacob and Sarah/Wanda forms the fulcrum of the story, a higher love blazes throughout the book – the love of the Jew for his God and his laws."<sup>164</sup>

### 3.3 Love in Islam

Love is "an emotion that was extensively theorized by Islamic scholars" throughout Muslim history.<sup>165</sup> Muslim writers addressed it from theological and philosophical perspectives, with regard to ethics and the everyday practice of religion, and in terms of its role in building identity and community. There are

<sup>161</sup> Franz Rosenzweig, *The Star of Redemption*, trans. Barbara E. Galli (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 187 ff; 135–137. Yudit Kornberg Greenberg, "Love and Reason in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig," *The European Legacy* 2 (1997), 98–103. Paul Mendes-Flohr, "Between Sensual and Heavenly Love: Franz Rosenzweig's Reading of the Song of Songs," in Deborah A. Green and Laura S. Lieber, eds., *Scriptural Exegesis: The Shapes of Culture and the Religious Imagination: Essays in Honor of Michael Fishbane* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 310–318.

<sup>162</sup> Ilya Dvorkin, "The Concept of Grammatical Organon in the Star of Redemption by Rosenzweig," *Religions* 12 (2021), 945–958.

<sup>163</sup> "He will love men as a *totality*. For he himself is not in need of man as fellowman. For him, the correlation exists in its infinity" (Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1995), 148).

<sup>164</sup> Elsie Levitan, "The Cosmos of Isaac Bashevis Singer a Critical View," *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (1981-) No. 1, Isaac Bashevis Singer: A Reconsideration (1981): 144.

<sup>165</sup> Marion Holmes Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad: Devotional Piety in Sunni Islam* (London: Routledge, 2007), 121.

dozens of words in Arabic to describe love.<sup>166</sup> The most commonly occurring in Muslim scholarship are *ḥubb*, which signifies love in connection with friendship; *maḥabbah*, which corresponds roughly to the Greek *agape* and joins the sacrifice of self to love of God; and *‘ishq*, which is found largely in Sufi and mystical writings and denotes ecstatic love. Another occurring term is *wudd*, which signifies a noble or divine rather than a romantic love and is used as one of the names of God (including twice in the Qur’an as *al-Wadud*, “the Most Loving”). The term love appears 124 times in the Qur’an, including the roots *ḥ-b-b* (95 times) and *w-d-d* (29 times).<sup>167</sup> In some literary contexts, the meanings of one word for love can broaden to include aspects of other terms. Overall, the number of references to love in the Qur’an evidences how “emotion is woven into” it and how such references are “an important part of creating a new community for believers whose emotional ties are to God and to each other.”<sup>168</sup> That community was formed in awareness of the necessity of defining belief differently from Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and others, alongside centuries of debates about the nature of love, including love as both human experience and divine essence.

In the Qur’an, love is given from God to humanity. In early Islam, “terms of love appear as relevant features of the relational system between God, human beings, and the community of believers.”<sup>169</sup> That system, as far as relations between God and humanity, was predicated on awareness of ongoing transactions between the two parties. God chose to love humanity, and humanity – in various ways, according to the different sectarian schools – was capable of loving God back. Submission to the will of God was entwined with a desire to see God, to be with God, to fully feel the love of God. Love and mercy were joined in God: “God will love you and forgive you your sins. God is forgiving, merciful” (Q 3:30–31). As centuries of Muslim commentaries argued, God could forgive humanity its failures to love Him, but writers kept in mind that in the Qur’an, “God’s love and mercy is not automatic... humans are not assured of God’s love and mercy: they must earn His approval through their actions.”<sup>170</sup> God’s love was great, but conditional, even as Muslims “are obliged to love him unconditionally.”<sup>171</sup>

<sup>166</sup> Amira Shamma Abdin, “Love in Islam,” *European Judaism* 37 (2004), 92–93.

<sup>167</sup> Karen Bauer, “Emotion in the Qur’an,” *Journal of Qur’anic Studies* 19 (2007), 3. Abdin counts 83 instances (Abdin, “Love in Islam,” 97). The count depends on how one identifies the roots and contexts.

<sup>168</sup> Karen Bauer, 10. <sup>169</sup> Nirenberg and Cappezone, 525. <sup>170</sup> Bauer, 10.

<sup>171</sup> Ismail Abdullah, Shayuthy Abdul Manas, Mohamed Ibrahim Mohamed Siddeek, and Muhammad Zakir Husain, “Ethics of Love in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study,” *Kuriositas: Media Komunikasi Sosial dan Keagamaan* 13 (2020), 133.



The model for the expression of love is the Prophet. It is possible to detect a “transitive affection between God and Muhammad, between Muhammad and his community of believers, and between *mu’minīm/muslimīn* [those who submit] and the Prophet.”<sup>172</sup> Transactional love is manifest in almsgiving for the care of the poor and orphaned, in acts of justice and mercy under the law, and in living an upright life according to ethical conventions grounded in Muslim theology. It is the duty of Muslims to love one another as God loves them. Love is performative and linked to behaving according to law.<sup>173</sup> Again, God’s love is earned. Those who live according to the law gain by their behavior the love and mercy of God. God withholds his love from those who are unworthy of it because of their corrupt behavior. The Opening of the Qur’an, the *Fātiḥa*, traces the contours of the relationship of humanity with God: “In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy! Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy, Master of the Day of Judgment. It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help. Guide us to the straight path: the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray” (Q 1:1–7).<sup>174</sup>

One submits to the divine will by building and maintaining a society that is just, merciful, and expressive of profound solidarity among its members.<sup>175</sup> In the Qur’an, “feeling is a part of believing” and its emphasis on love “creates a sense of community.”<sup>176</sup> Love is a covenant that engages and binds. It is the basis of a “communitarian identity” that is “a condition of faith and a political expression of loyalty.”<sup>177</sup> Muslim philosophers such as al-Farabi (d. 950), al-Tusi (d. 1274), and Miskawayh (d. 1030) contributed to a political discourse of love that included, for example, al-Farabi’s view that it was the duty of political leaders to nurture and sustain love among citizens. Love was “a relational representation of an ethic of living in spiritual solidarity within a structured social body enjoined to the good,”<sup>178</sup> including obedience to the tenets of the good life as revealed in the Qur’an and elaborated in foundational traditions.

Obedience and love were joined in ritual. Islam encouraged a habit of love: for God, the Prophet, and among people. The habit of multiple periods of daily prayer, for example, was a habit of feeling. Love for God was inculcated and sustained through daily prayer, and through engagement with the Qur’an.

<sup>172</sup> Nirenberg and Cappezzone, 526. The word “mu’minim” in the translation quoted may be “mu’minin.”

<sup>173</sup> Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammed*.

<sup>174</sup> Translation here is from *The Qur’an*, translated by Muhammad A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>175</sup> Tamara Sonn, “Introducing,” in Andrew Rippin and Jawid Mojaddedi, eds., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to the Qur’an* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 15.

<sup>176</sup> Bauer, 16. <sup>177</sup> Nirenberg and Cappezzone, 526. <sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

Al-Ghazali observed that “Ecstasy is truth. It is what grows up out of the abundance of love of God most High and out of sincerity in desiring Him and in longing to meet Him. That is stirred up by hearing the Qur’an.”<sup>179</sup> The education of a Muslim in learning to love began with recitation of the Qur’an, so that “the rules of *tajwid* [a guide to recitation] were learned at first not as complicated schemes but as embodied habit.”<sup>180</sup> Emotion was embodied, so that feeling as well as pronunciation became habitual. The same was the case for prayer. Worship of God in prayer might involve motives of obedience, a desire to draw close to God, submissiveness, or the glorification of God. These dispositions “were also understood as affective states,” and those “feelings towards God were not merely expected to be present; they were understood to require cultivation and development as one’s relationship with God was deepened by repeated acts of mindful worship.”<sup>181</sup> A central emotion in prayer was love, and even the rigidly policing reformer Ibn Taymiyya made love a centerpiece of his thinking, proposing that worship, including formal *ṣalāt*, was a joining of love with humility.<sup>182</sup> Many classical Muslim authorities concurred that *ṣalāt* was to evoke emotional piety and especially love.<sup>183</sup>

The ritual inculcation of the habit of love was dramatically present in celebrations of the birth of the Prophet. The *mawlid* was grounded in a program of cultivated reverence and love of the Prophet. A Damascene writer professed: “God has made the love [of the Prophet] an individual obligation.”<sup>184</sup> Abu al-Allas al-Azafi (d. 1236), who was instrumental in establishing the *mawlid* across the Maghreb, produced commentary that “explores the way in which emotion motivates and consolidates the acquisition of knowledge,” and for him, the knowledge most urgently needed within the Muslim community was awareness of the Prophet’s *sunna* and religious inventiveness. He aimed to create joyous celebrations that would succeed in “enticing hearts.”<sup>185</sup>

<sup>179</sup> Cited in Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qu’ran* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 95. There are several English translations of this key text bearing on emotion in Islam, “*Etiquette of Qur’anic Recitation*,” which is Part 8 of Ghazali’s enormous *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*. I have consulted *Al-Ghazali on Proper Conduct for the Recitation of the Qur’an: Book VIII of the Revival of the Religious Sciences* (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2022). See also Duncan B. MacDonald, “Emotional Religion in Islām as Affected by Music and Singing,” *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1901), 195–252.

<sup>180</sup> Anna M. Gade, *Perfection Makes Practice: Learning, Emotion, and the Recited Qur’an* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), 126. Gade proposes that taking emotions as embodied habits is but one way among others of understanding recitation (270).

<sup>181</sup> Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 63.

<sup>182</sup> Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, 65; Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979), 48.

<sup>183</sup> Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice*, 66–70.

<sup>184</sup> Quoted in Marion Katz, *The Birth of the Prophet Muhammad*, 117. <sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, 118, 119.

Muslim scholars who followed in his steps similarly promoted the *mawlid* festival “as a means of sowing the love of the prophet in the hearts” of people. In such a way “the love of the Prophet is thus inculcated both through discursive means” and through reinforcing “the affective foundation of an adult’s religious practice.”<sup>186</sup> The point was to teach love, specifically love for the prophet, through habituation. The activities of the *mawlid*, then, “do not merely perform the love of the Prophet, but produce a feeling of emotional intimacy with him.” They prompt a person to “performatively express one’s devotion to his person, while in turn themselves producing appropriate emotional dispositions.”<sup>187</sup> Muslims were no different from Jews or Christians, who had their own performances, ranging from meals to pilgrimages and philanthropy. Love in monotheistic religions is always ritual love.

Sufis, whose radical views of love and intense religious practice issued in stunningly creative conceptions of affect, self, and the world, created their own scripts for feeling love.

For al-Ghazali, the heart’s desire was to meet God and to feel joy in the presence of God. One of his foundational statements in that regard was his eleventh-century *Book of Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment*, which details Sufism as the practice of mystical love. It established the *necessity* of loving God and influenced the renowned poets Rumi and Hafiz, among many other Sufi figures.<sup>188</sup> Emphasizing the interrelatedness of love and knowledge, al-Ghazali framed a relationship between the two as one of an ongoing reflexive causal chain that continuously advanced and deepened love and knowledge as well as tightening their enmeshment.<sup>189</sup> Al-Ghazali emphasized that a middle ground of moderation and equilibrium was desirable in all human behavior, keeping in mind that “the thing most hated by God is passion,”<sup>190</sup> and echoing Aristotle’s *metriopatheia*: a space between Neoplatonic ecstasy and Stoic *apatheia*.<sup>191</sup> He explained: “Lukewarm water is neither hot nor cold, but in between the two and, as it were, free of the characteristics of both: generosity

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 120. <sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>188</sup> Ahmad Ghazālī, *Al-Ghazālī: Love, Longing, Intimacy, and Contentment. Kitāb al-maḥabbah wa’l-shawq wa’l-uns wa’l-riḍā: Book XXXVI of the revival of the religious sciences, Iḥyā’ ulūm al-dīn*,” translated by Eric Ormsby (Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2011). Love of God was at the same time obedience to God (2, 5), affinity for God (36–40, 103–105), knowledge of God (71–77), and fear of God (120–124).

<sup>189</sup> Mansoureh Ebrahimi, Ahmadali Gholami, and Kamaruzaman Yusoff. “Al-Ghazali’s Ma’rifah and Mahabbah’s Relations.” *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 20 (2021), 65–76.

<sup>190</sup> Al-Ghazali quoted in Taneli Kukkonen, “Al-Ghazali on the Emotions,” in Georges Tamer, ed., *Islam and Rationality: The Impact of Al-Ghazali. Papers Collected on His 900th Anniversary*, Vol. 1, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 148. Citation of Al-Ghazali is: *Iḥyā’ XXXVI*, bayān 6, 2617.7–8.

<sup>191</sup> Al-Ghazali was renowned for his criticisms of Aristotle, but drew much from him. The late tenth-century writer al-Daylami constructed a theory of love that leaned heavily on Neoplatonic ideas.

lies similarly between extravagance and stinginess, courage between cowardice and recklessness, moderation between voraciousness and indifference, and so it goes with the rest of the character traits. It is thus the extreme in matters that is reprehensible.”<sup>192</sup> The Sufi mystic and saint Rabi’a al-‘Adawiyya (d. 801), a woman who lived as an ascetic much of her life and reputedly introduced the concept of Divine Love (*‘ishq-e-Haqeeqi*),<sup>193</sup> read passion into love of God in a way that did not seem to undermine previous philosophers’ anxieties about passion, and her poetry and theorization of love became one of the foundations of the tenth-century Sufi transition from *ḥubb* to *‘ishq* in Sufi religious discourses.<sup>194</sup> *‘Ishq* has no Quranic authority, and so its religious meanings were slippery. For Rabi’a, *‘ishq*, while passionate love, was also a disinterested love of God, a love that “leaves no room for other love.”<sup>195</sup> Even the Ka’ba, she prayed, “is only a stone to me.”<sup>196</sup>

O beloved of hearts, I have none like unto Thee,  
 therefore have pity this day on the sinner  
 who comes to Thee.  
 O my Hope and Rest and my delight  
 The Heart can Love none other but Thee.<sup>197</sup>

While Rab’ia’s most innovative ideas about *‘ishq* remained within Sufism, her thinking more generally acquired gravity among a broader circle of Muslim writers over time, so that during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, the prominent Hanbalite figures Ibn al-Jawzi (d. 597/1200), Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1), and Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 751/1350) were fashioning theories of love of God that embraced traditional pietistic elements of Sufism without adopting Sufi antinominanism.<sup>198</sup> That enterprise led to mixed results, as much difference of opinion remained about whether *‘ishq*, as intense love of God, could be

<sup>192</sup> Quoted in Kukkonen, “Al-Ghazali on the Emotions,” 152–153. Citation of Al-Ghazali is: *Ihyā’* XXII, bayān 3, 1448.10–16.

<sup>193</sup> Persian version quoted here. Arabic would be “*‘ishq al-ḥaqīqī*.”

<sup>194</sup> Rabi’a’s thinking has been compared to that of the Christian mystic Julian of Norwich (Ayoush Lazikani, “Encompassment in Love: Rabi’a of Basra in Dialogue with Julian of Norwich,” *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 46 (2020), 115–136). Scholars have taken her biography as an extensively enhanced hagiography, so that it is difficult to identify exactly how she lived and what she believed; nevertheless, her historical construction as a teacher, writer, and saint has been central to the development Muslim tradition.

<sup>195</sup> Binyamin Abrahamov, *Divine Love in Islamic Mysticism: The Teachings of Al-Ghazali and Al-Dabbagh* (London: Routledge, 2003), 28.

<sup>196</sup> Quoted in Margaret Smith, *Rabi’a the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 8.

<sup>197</sup> Quoted in Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 40. Cite is Smith, *Rabi’a*, 55.

<sup>198</sup> Joseph Norment Bell, *Love Theory in Later Hanbalite Islam* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1979).

separated from *‘ishq* that would only cause trouble in negotiating relationships with people and things in everyday life.

### 3.4 Anger in Islam

Just as Jews, Christians, and Muslims at times sought to clarify their respective collective identities by opposing themselves to each other on the basis of their valuation and practice of love, they also, to differing extents, imagined themselves distinct because of their anger.

In the Qur’an the term anger, in several Arabic roots, occurs 39 times.<sup>199</sup> The leading context for its occurrence is in reference to God’s anger toward those who are not part of the Muslim community, including unbelievers and the opponents of Muhammad. The centrality of God’s anger is plain from the first sura of the Qur’an, which states the fact of God’s anger toward those who have gone astray (Q 1:7). The anger of God, Muhammad, and prophets such as Moses and Jonah, is righteous, as in the case of Moses finding the people worshipping a golden calf, an occasion on which he “returned to his people full of wrath” (Q 20:86). The prophet Jonah “stormed off from his city in a rage” (Q 21:87) because the people would not listen. Allah’s own anger in some cases included a curse, such as that on hypocrites, polytheists, and idolaters: “Allah has become angry with them and has cursed them and prepared for them Hell” (Q 48:6). Such wayward persons included especially Jews, the “People of the Book” (Q 3:110),<sup>200</sup> who rejected the messengers sent by Allah and accordingly were “laden with the burden of Allah’s wrath, and humiliation is stuck upon them – and all this because they rejected the signs of Allah and slayed the Prophets without right, and because they disobeyed and transgressed” (Q 3:112). Just as pointedly, for any who argue against the revelation of the religion of Allah, attempting to turn persons from it, “their argument is invalid with their Lord, and upon them is His wrath, and for them is a severe punishment” (Q 42:16). That said, sinners guilty of any of a wide range of offenses could prompt the anger of Allah and the anger of his Prophet.

Anger was a boundary, and “investigating a powerful emotion like anger has the potential to tell us a lot about the cultural system of early modern Ottoman society” as well as other periods and places in Muslim history.<sup>201</sup> Muslim depictions of anger, and especially descriptions of the anger of God, were a “strategy of differentiation,” meant to sort Muslims from Jews, and

<sup>199</sup> Bauer (p.3) identifies its occurrence in this way: as the root gh-d-b, 24 times, as the root gh-y-z, 11 times and as the root s-kh-t, 4 times.

<sup>200</sup> Jews in this instance but in Islamic writings the term can also apply to Christians.

<sup>201</sup> N. Zeynep Yelçe, “Royal Wrath: Curbing the Anger of the Sultan,” in Karl A.E. Enekel and Anita Traninger, eds., *Discourses of Anger in the Early Modern Period* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 442.

“a sign of how much the Prophet feared competition from Jewish monotheism.”<sup>202</sup> Over time, that Muslim concern increasingly applied as well to another monotheistic religion, Christianity. Through references to God’s anger, the Qu’ran located in religious geography groups that opposed the messengers of God, the prophet Muhammad, and Islam in general. Islam defined the holy community partly in terms of an emotional orientation that was also cultural and spatial: Islam and its enemies were separated by an emotional boundary. Muslims dealt anger to their enemies and their enemies dealt it back. Like their opponents, Muslims considered their own anger justified, and the anger of others toward them gratuitous.

Everyday anger could be warranted in cases where it arose from resistance to a profanation of Islam. Numerous hadiths recount the angry response of the Prophet to matters large and small, from behavior in the mosque to how a person dressed. A hadith reports: “The Prophet saw some sputum in the prayer direction of the mosque and he became so angry that his face turned red.”<sup>203</sup> At times, the offense itself might be more subtle than spitting, but anger might still be warranted. According to another account: “Ali b. Abi Tailib reported that Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) gave me to wear a garment in the form of a silk cloak. I went out wearing it, but saw signs of anger on his face, so I tore it and distributed among my women.”<sup>204</sup>

The wives, followers, friends, and others in the entourage of the Prophet likewise were depicted occasionally as angry in the scores of references to anger in the hadiths. Their anger in various ways often was a figure of the anger of Allah and the Prophet.<sup>205</sup> But it was the anger of the Prophet that was paramount and it was he who thus played the central role in the socio-cultural processes of identity construction and maintenance within the emergent Muslim community. In that sense, “the Prophet’s anger, as anger on behalf of God, is an act that creates cultural identities and differences among the Prophet’s followers.”<sup>206</sup>

Muslim efforts to distinguish themselves from other groups, and especially Christians and Jews, additionally involved characterizing those opponents as possessed by unjustified and uncontrollable rage, and juxtaposing them to Muslims who as a matter of religious ethics practiced control of their anger.

<sup>202</sup> Zouhair Ghazzal, “From Anger on Behalf of God to ‘Forbearance’ in Islamic Literature,” in Barbara H. Rosenwein, ed., *Anger & Past: The Social Uses of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 207.

<sup>203</sup> *Sunan Ibn Majah* 762 (Vol. 1, Book 4, Hadith 762).

<sup>204</sup> *Sahih Muslim* 2071d (Book 34, Hadith 5172). For a psychological theorization of such anger see Allan Brown, Alexis Abernethy, Richard Gorsuch, and Alvin C. Dueck. “Sacred Violations, Perceptions of Injustice and Anger in Muslims,” *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 40 (2010), 1003–1027.

<sup>205</sup> Ghazzal, “From Anger on Behalf of God to ‘Forbearance’ in Islamic Literature.”

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

A key component of Muslim conceptualization of the nature and place of anger was insistence that believers were obliged to control it. Indeed, the preponderance of Muslim writing about anger addresses the obligation to do just that and offers both examples and advice illustrating how a devout person could accomplish it. At the same time, it condemns the uncontrollable anger of other groups such as the Jews. That practice rose and fell over time, and survives in traces in the polemics of extremist groups. Its role as emotional boundary in differentiating Muslims from Jews is observable in the thinking of twentieth-century Egyptian fundamentalist Sayyid Qutb, who wrote that “we may understand another Jewish characteristic. . . . These people (the Jews) went to an extreme in anger and rage – an extreme that exceeded all proper bounds.”<sup>207</sup>

The sayings of the Prophet include instances in which the suppression of anger is given as an ideal. Those include a depiction of God as merciful, an emotional quality juxtaposed to anger: “When God completed the creation, He wrote the following which is with Him above His throne, ‘My mercy has taken precedence over my anger’” (Mishkat al-Masabih 2364). That mercy allows for the holy community to grow and flourish, but at the same time, it betokens the anger of God that marks a boundary separating Muslims from others: “Had Allah willed, He could have easily made all humanity into a single community of believers. But He admits into his mercy whoever He wills. And the wrongdoers will have no protector or helper” (Q 42:8).<sup>208</sup>

To live well as a Muslim was to suppress anger and cultivate mercy. Those who take that path, “when they get angry, they forgive” (Q 42:37), and in that fashion seek Allah: “There is no gulp that brings greater reward with Allah than a gulp of anger that a man swallows (suppresses), seeking thereby the face of Allah” (*Sunan Ibn Majah* 4189). Hadiths reinforced in various ways the importance of making a habit of turning away from anger, and sometimes in the plainest of terms: “When one of you becomes angry while standing, he should sit down. If the anger leaves him, well and good; otherwise he should lie down” (*Sunan Abi Dawud* 4782). To let go of anger was to prove oneself powerful and righteous because “the strong is not the one who overcomes the people by his strength, but the strong is the one who controls himself while in anger”

<sup>207</sup> Sayyid Qutb, “Our Struggle with the Jews,” in Andrew G. Bostom, *Legacy of Islamic Antisemitism: From Sacred Texts to Solemn History* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2011), 358. Qutb was a member of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood whose writings were central to al-Qaeda and ISIS. His views should not be taken as the norm for Muslims, but as an example of the survival of an extremist caricaturing of Jews that has occurred within some fundamentalist groups.

<sup>208</sup> Hubert Grimme suggested that the deployment of references to God’s mercy and “the Merciful,” (ar-Raḥmān) in the Qur’an likewise arose from an effort to sort social tensions (*Mohammed. Erster Teil: Das Leben* (Munster: Aschendorffschen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1892)).



(*Sahih al-Bukhari* 6114). Those “who repress anger and who pardon men, verily, Allah loves” (Q 3:134).

Powerful rulers who forgave offenses and insults, who pardoned enemies after the conclusion of hostilities, and who tempered their rage with compassion and benevolence were ethical exemplars. Anger, often in the form of wrath in Muslim literature, was an emotion alongside mercy, and the two were “presented as a dichotomy inherent in the nature of the ruler.”<sup>209</sup> Wrath and mercy were qualities of God, and the balance of the two in a ruler drew on the divine model. Sultan Mehmed II, after his conquest of Constantinople in 1453, was cast as such a ruler: “After burning the city to ashes with the fire of rage and violence, he looked with merciful eyes and turned it into a decorated rose garden.”<sup>210</sup>

Mercy did not replace anger, but, rather, it emerged in practice because reason tempered anger. In the thirteenth-century Persian *Nasirean Ethics*,<sup>211</sup> anger was characterized as a gratification of appetite that was out of kilter with reason.<sup>212</sup> The *Ethics* recommended that “a person, in earliest youth, acquires the habit of restraining his soul from the gratification of appetites, exercising self-control when assailed by anger.”<sup>213</sup> Just as the ruler displayed qualities of anger and mercy in balance by emulating those as they were manifest in Allah, so also should a Muslim in general follow the lead of the ruler, “equipping himself with long-suffering and self-control in anticipation of the motion of concupiscence and anger; in this he follows the example of prudent princes.”<sup>214</sup>

The many instances in which hadiths discuss anger typically include a report of the physical signs of anger, such as reddened eyes and face, swollen arteries, twitchiness, and loud or unusual vocalizations. The *Ethics* treated the reasons for those physical signs directly: “Thus, when the soul is affected by excess of anger, or the dominance of passion, or constant grief, this necessarily brings about a change in the body’s form in all sorts of ways, such as agitation, trembling, . . .”<sup>215</sup> Anger had its visible telltale signs, but underneath those were other movements in the body that produced them, such as the overproduction of yellow bile, or the fact that “the brain and arteries are filled with a dark vapour.”<sup>216</sup> But even those physiological changes were themselves the product of a deeper, more profound cause: the devil. Reason was a powerful force for the regulation of anger, for the practice of forbearance. But equally powerful were the manipulations of the devil which intensified appetite and drove anger to excess.

<sup>209</sup> Yelçe, “Royal Wrath: Curbing the Anger of the Sultan,” 443. <sup>210</sup> Cited in Yelçe, 444.

<sup>211</sup> Magrit Pernau discusses its roots in Aristotle in “Love and Compassion for the Community: Emotions and Practices among North Indian Muslims, c. 1870–1930,” *The Indian Economic and Social History Review* 54 (2017), 24–25.

<sup>212</sup> *Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, The Nasirean Ethics*, trans. G.M. Wickens, Vol. 23 (London: Routledge, 2011), 107.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 120 <sup>214</sup> *Ibid.* <sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 124. <sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

Muslims understood that “To swallow the rage is the habit of rulers/The work of rage is the art of the devil.”<sup>217</sup> Beneath the reddened face of an angry person was the hand of the devil turning the soul from reason, self-control, and balance. A ninth-century *Abu Dawud* hadith attributed to Sulaiman b. Surad relates: “Two men reviled each other in the presence of the Prophet. Then the eyes of one of them became red and his jugular veins swelled. The Apostle of Allah said: ‘I know a phrase by repeating which the man could get rid of the angry feelings: I seek refuge in Allah from the accursed devil’” (*Sunan Abu Dawud* 4781). The devil deployed a range of mental and emotional tricks in seeking to sway a person from forbearance to anger.<sup>218</sup> One of those, according to al-Ghazali and other writers, was to puff up a person with pride,<sup>219</sup> which would lead to arrogance, loss of control, and rage. And that effort was grounded in a devilish understanding of human nature: “When God created Adam in Paradise he left him as he wished to leave him and Satan began to walk around him to see what he was. When he realised that he was hollow he knew that he had been created unable to control himself” (*Sahih Muslim* 2611a).<sup>220</sup>

Anger, for all of its undesirable aspects, finally, was at times appropriate for Muslims. A lack of anger could be cowardice, that is, a refusal to rise to the challenge of defending the faith against infidels, or a reluctance to chastise a person in the interest of persuading them to reform their sinful ways. If a Muslim believed that “anger was created by God as a force for mankind to defend themselves from threats that harm him,” then “so anger will always exist in the human being and will appear when there is a cause of external factors.”<sup>221</sup>

### 3.5 Anger in Christianity

The Christian writer Nicetas of Byzantium (d. 912) typified Christian thinking about Muhammad’s anger in writing, “He was by nature perverse and talkative, or rather stupid and bestial, a coward too, quick to anger, distrustful and

<sup>217</sup> Yelçe, 451.

<sup>218</sup> Magrit Pernau, “Male Anger and Female Malice: Emotions in Indo-Muslim Advice Literature,” *History Compass* 10 (2012), 123.

<sup>219</sup> Ghazali wrote: “He will not be able to speak the truth while within him is pride. He will not be able to leave anger while within him is pride” (*Ihya Ulum al-Din*, 6: 491–492). A useful overview of Ghazali’s thinking about the relation between anger (wrath) and mercy is a paper by Christian Lange, “Sitting by the Ruler’s Throne: Al-Ghazali on Justice and Mercy in This World and the Next,” 2011, [www.academia.edu/4069916/Sitting\\_by\\_the\\_rulers\\_throne\\_Al\\_Ghazali\\_on\\_justice\\_and\\_mercy\\_in\\_this\\_world\\_and\\_the\\_next](http://www.academia.edu/4069916/Sitting_by_the_rulers_throne_Al_Ghazali_on_justice_and_mercy_in_this_world_and_the_next).

<sup>220</sup> See Stefan Sperl, “Man’s ‘Hollow Core’: Ethics and Aesthetics in Ḥadīth Literature and Classical Arabic Adab,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, 70 (2007), 459–486.

<sup>221</sup> Saiful Anwar, Muchamad Adam Basori, and Sintya Kartika Prameswari, “Anger and Control in Islamic Education,” *Advances in Social Sciences, Education, and Humanities Research* 581 (2021), 340.

arrogant.”<sup>222</sup> Christian writers applied that judgment to Muslims generally, caricaturing them as incessantly raging. The ninth-century Cordovan writers Alvarus and Eulogius, central figures in the voluntary martyr movement in Iberia, like many Christians at the time constructed Christian identity by portraying Islam as ungodly evil, and Muslims as the practitioners of a perverse emotionality characterized by “exaggerated anger.”<sup>223</sup> Christians themselves performed their own rich theatre of raging violence during the subsequent Crusades, an enactment that prompted an array of Christian theological analyses, and popular commentary by leaders and chroniclers of the Crusades, that aimed to justify that Christian rage.<sup>224</sup> But as the Crusades came to an end, the idea of extreme anger – *zelus* – as a legitimate and useful Christian emotion diminished, and Christian thinking about anger began to turn back to its familiar stances developed from the appropriation of Aristotle and the ancient philosophers.

The task of Christian writers from the time of the primitive community forward, and notably during the Patristic era, was a daunting one: to weave together an exceptionally diverse array of ideas about anger in such a way as to avoid framing anger as impossibly contradictory in its meanings. The testimonies of the philosophers, the Hebrew Bible, and the emergent Christian community took, respectively, three different tacks in defining anger and establishing its meanings for personal conduct and social life. Christian theologians nonetheless endeavored to join those perspectives in conceptualizing anger and constructing an ethics cognizant of it.

Theologians did not underestimate the anger of Jesus. The carpenter who preached the necessity of turning the other cheek (Matt. 5:38–40), loving one’s neighbor (Matt. 22:39), and avoiding anger at the risk of hellfire (Matt. 5:22) also cursed a fig tree for not having fruit out of season (Mark 11: 12–14), and became a furious firebrand in overturning the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple (Matt. 21:12). Modern scholars have written extensively about the Temple cleansing,<sup>225</sup> including how the depiction of the anger of Jesus in the cleansing pericope defines a boundary between insiders and outsiders.<sup>226</sup>

<sup>222</sup> Nicetas of Byzantium, *Refutation, Destruction, and Indictment of the Most Foolish and Abominable Book*, cited in Gaudeul, J-M, *Encounters and Clashes: Islam and Christianity in History*, Vol 2 of 2 Vols. (Rome: Pontificio Istituto di Studi Arabi e Islamici, 2000), 31.

<sup>223</sup> The quotation is from Charles L. Tieszen, *Christian Identity and Islam in Medieval Spain* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 45. See the larger discussion in “Chapter Two: Outlining the Borders of Religious Identity: The Polemic of Eulogius and Alvarus,” 45–99.

<sup>224</sup> Stephen J. Spencer, *Emotions in a Crusading Context, 1095–1291* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 209–239.

<sup>225</sup> Some of the twentieth-century scholarship is discussed in David Seeley, “Jesus’ Temple Act,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 55 (1993), 263–283.

<sup>226</sup> George H. Guthrie, “The Tree and the Temple: Echoes of a New Ingathering and Renewed Exile (Mark 11.12–21).” *New Testament Studies* 68, no. 1 (2022), 26–37.



**Figure 3** Bernardino Mei, *Christ Cleansing the Temple* (c. 1655). The subject was popular with seventeenth-century painters who were attracted to its potential for the representation of strong emotions. Christian theologians labored to reconcile the anger of Jesus with his explicit command to turn the other cheek.

But the larger question of the anger of God has been one with which Christians have wrestled for two millennia.

The earliest Christian discursive framings of anger were grounded in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Rhetoric*. For Aristotle, anger arises from "an apparent injustice" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 5.8, 1135b25-9) and the emotive process of coalescing anger lies in the accompanying hope for revenge, because "revenge is in itself pleasant" (*Rhetoric* II.2, 1).<sup>227</sup> Anger for Aristotle follows from a perception of social misconduct. It is a response to behavior that appears to endanger social solidarity (*Rhetoric* II.2.1378a31-33).<sup>228</sup> As important as that argument was for the long Western arc of thinking about emotions, and for, as well, an emerging Christianity as it marked the boundaries of its community against others, not all the ancient philosophers or Christians agreed with Aristotle. In his first-century treatise *On Anger*, Seneca characterized it as insanity, a position taken up and maintained by some other philosophers. It was a perspective well in evidence in some Crusading-era condemnations of anger

<sup>227</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans., Roger Crisp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 95; Aristotle: *Rhetoric*, Volume 2, edited by Edward Meredith Cope and John Edwin Sandys (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 13.

<sup>228</sup> Aristotle: *Rhetoric*, Volume 2, 13–14.

as *insania*, a condition which was depicted in terms similar to what Seneca had proposed a millennium earlier: “Their eyes blaze and flicker, their faces flush deeply as the blood surges up from the depths of the heart, their lips quiver and their teeth grind, their hair bristles and stands on end, their breathing is forced and ragged, . . . they groan and bellow . . . and stamp the ground” (*De ira* 1.1.4).<sup>229</sup> For Seneca, anger was a disability, something to be alleviated because revenge was pointless: “Often it’s so inexpedient to avenge a wrong that it’s not even expedient to acknowledge it” (*De ira* 2.33.2).<sup>230</sup>

Some early Christian theologians, influenced both by Aristotle and the Stoics, sought a middle ground by focusing on the management of anger.<sup>231</sup> John Chrysostom (*About Rage and Anger*), Basil of Caesarea (*Against the Angry*), and Gregory of Nazianzus (*Against Anger*) pursued that line of argument, advising against anger entirely, the last of those arguing that anger as θυμός (*thumos*), a manifestation of passion, was a “sudden boiling of the mind”<sup>232</sup> and “alienation from God.”<sup>233</sup> Other theological discussions of anger – especially the anger of God – followed more closely the cleaner Stoic position of Epicurus and also that of Cicero that the gods feel no anger.<sup>234</sup>

In working against the background of canonical accounts of an angry Jesus and wrathful Yahweh, and alongside the synoptic and Pauline accounts rejecting anger in favor of love and forgiveness, Christian writers struggled to theorize whether God felt anger. The second-century convert Aristides of Athens believed that “anger and wrath he possess not.”<sup>235</sup> Marcion (d. 160)

<sup>229</sup> Seneca, *De ira* 1.1.3-4. Translation of *De Ira* by Robert Kaster in *Anger, Mercy, Revenge* by Lucius Annaeus Seneca, translated by Robert A. Kaster and Martha Nussbaum (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>231</sup> Much of this bears likeness to the thinking of Plutarch, the first-century Middle Platonist who wrote *On the Control of Anger* (Περὶ ἀοργησίας – *De cohibenda ira*), a treatise collected in the medieval *Moralia*.

<sup>232</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus quoted in Martin Hinterberger, “Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus Speaking about Anger and Envy: Some Remarks on the Fathers’ Methodology of Treating Emotions and Modern Emotion Studies” *Studia Patristica* 83 (2017), 338.

<sup>233</sup> Nazianzus quoted in Kostas Kalimtzis, *Taming Anger: The Hellenic Approach to the Limitations of Reason* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 135. Hinterberger observes: “It also has to be taken into consideration that Basil and Gregory had an audience in mind which consisted primarily of free male citizens of a provincial city. While basically grounded in antique and late antique philosophy, the specifically Christian character of the presentation of anger and envy was almost exclusively due to their connection to exemplary stories from the Bible” (“Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus,” 341). William V. Harris, *Restraining Rage: The Ideology of Anger Control in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 124–126.

<sup>234</sup> A useful discussion of some related developments is Michael C. McCarthy, “Divine Wrath and Human Anger: Embarrassment Ancient and New,” *Theological Studies* 70 (2009), 845–874.

<sup>235</sup> *The Apology of Aristides on behalf of the Christians: From a Syriac Ms. Preserved on Mount Sinai*, edited with an introduction and translation by J. Rendel Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1891), 36.

similarly deemphasized the wrath of God as it was abundantly represented in the Old Testament. In the early third century Tertullian argued against that, maintaining that the meting out of justice required anger in God, a theme taken up by Augustine.<sup>236</sup> Irenaeus concurred but the Hellenistic Jew Philo of Alexandria, a key source for Christian writers, nuanced the argument by claiming that God's anger was affectless, and thus different from human anger.

In the West, Christian ideas drawn from Scriptural exegesis eventually outweighed the influence of Hellenic philosophers in setting the conceptual terms for understanding anger.<sup>237</sup>

At the same time, the loose ends and the strains in Patristic writings about anger remained, including the notion that God's wrath was actually God's loving superintendence and that wrath was divine and by corollary a legitimate emotion for humans. Christians accordingly navigated between two positions that could become extreme (i.e., righteous v. illegitimate). Christian leaders noticed that volatility and took risks, at times, to speak to it, especially as illegitimate. Bishop Ambrose of Milan boldly condemned the Roman emperor Theodosius (d. 395) for his "vehemence" and forbade him communion until he had performed months of penance.<sup>238</sup> An equally forceful condemnation of anger was the decision of Pope Gregory I to include anger on his list of the seven deadly sins at the end of the sixth century.

Thomas Aquinas reiterated Gregory's list of seven sins and articulated a theory of anger that marked a transitional period in Christian thinking about emotion. Thomas directly faced the enduring problem of the relation between the passions, and the spiritual affections that issued in virtuous behavior. Among passion's detractors, for example, the fourth-century Cappadocian Gregory of Nyssa contended that the body generated passions that threatened to run away with the soul that sought God. He famously wrote: "if reason lets go of the reins like a charioteer who has become entangled in his chariot and is dragged along by it, being pulled wherever the irrational impulse of the team carries him, then, our faculties are turned towards emotions such as are seen among the irrational animals."<sup>239</sup> Such a notion of a qualifiedly collaborative relation of body to soul, of bodily passions to spiritual affections, in Aquinas's

<sup>236</sup> See McCarthy, 860–861. <sup>237</sup> Kalimtzis, 135–136 and passim.

<sup>238</sup> Ambrose of Milan, *Letter LI. Addressed to the Emperor Theodosius after the Massacre at Thessalonica*, Section 4, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, second series, Vol. 10, translated and edited by Augustus Henry Eugene de Romestin, E. De Rometin, and Henry Thomas Forbes Duckworth (Oxford: James Parker, 1894), 451. Stephen Williams and Gerard Friell, *Theodosius: The Empire at Bay* (London: E. T. Batsford, 1995), 68.

<sup>239</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and the Resurrection," in *The Fathers of the Church: St. Gregory. Ascetical Works*, trans., Virginia Woods Callahan, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1967), 222.



hands subsequently became a frame for understanding anger. His metaphysics steered toward an Aristotelian understanding of reason as governor of the passions but more specifically to an Aristotelian hylomorphism in which soul and body collaborated as one substance, the former informing the latter. Such a view made possible a conceptualization of emotions as a matter of some degree of interplay between the holy affections and the passions. A skilled synthesizer of previous ideas about emotion, Aquinas argued that there was, as one scholar has characterized it, a “logic of desire”: cognition, will, and body all were involved in the emotional life of a Christian.<sup>240</sup> In the *Summa*, anger, accordingly, was not intrinsically *insania*. It was, in fact, when led by reason, the manifestation of a sense of justice and an attribute of humanness. It may be the case that Thomas’s thinking about anger indeed was “apologia pro ira.”<sup>241</sup>

Nevertheless, what historian Marc Bloch called the “emotional instability” of medieval Europe remained the defining context for theological argument and clerical preaching about anger, as well as everyday practice of it. For Bloch “the despairs, the rages, the impulsive acts, the sudden revulsions of feeling present great difficulties to historians, who are instinctively disposed to reconstruct the past in terms of the rational,” when, in fact, so much having to do with “modes of feeling” in feudal Europe appears “irrational.”<sup>242</sup> And when there were so many different Christian understandings of anger – some formed in an effort to construct identity vis a vis Muslims and Jews, some tied to rigid biblical exegesis, some attempting to carry forward the arguments of the ancient philosophers, and some emerging from the streets and fields – the predicament of historians in trying to pinpoint Christian thinking about anger, and emotional practice generally, seems even more fraught. There is little that is typical to point to, but one guide might be the activities of the armies of mendicant preachers in the wake of Thomas. For the most part they taught that anger was a sin while simultaneously they sought to clarify social codes governing its legitimate expression.<sup>243</sup> That uneasy bargain remained at the center of much subsequent Christian teaching about anger.

In early modern Europe the wrath of God – as represented in the account of the destruction of Sodom, for example – came into clearer focus in theological

<sup>240</sup> Nicholas E. Lombardo, *The Logic of Desire: Aquinas on Emotion* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011); Robert Miner, *Thomas Aquinas on the Passions: A Study of Summa Theologiae Ia2ae* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Paul Gondreau, *The Passions of Christ’s Soul in the Theology of St. Thomas Aquinas* by (Providence, RI: Cluny Media, 2018).

<sup>241</sup> Miner, 273–286.

<sup>242</sup> Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*, trans. L. A. Manyon (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 73.

<sup>243</sup> Marc B. Cels, “God’s Wrath against the Wrathful in Medieval Mendicant Preaching,” *Canadian Journal of History* 43 (2008), 217–226.



inquiry.<sup>244</sup> Jewish thought about the anger of God, which always had informed Christian theological writing, came more to the forefront of discussion for a while. That had consequences for how Christians thought about their own anger. Luther confessed to his dinner table companions what they already well knew from his rants and rages, namely, that one of his seemingly intractable sins was his anger,<sup>245</sup> and he theorized anger as a perversion of reason, and one that signaled a breakdown overall in the supervision of passion by reason. He said that “God is never angry” and “cannot become angry [or] laugh,” yet Luther also believed that persons needed to fear punishment from God in order to avoid sin.<sup>246</sup> But God did *feel*, more generally, and was above all for Luther a loving God whose love was felt by Christians. And while anger was a sin Luther preached against, at the same time he believed it could have a positive effect on one’s commitment to doing good: “When I want to compose, write, pray, and preach well, I have to be angry, for [anger] refreshes my whole blood system, my understanding is sharpened, and all listless thoughts and temptations give way.”<sup>247</sup> The problems of the anger of God, the anger of humans, the relationship of passion to spiritual affections, and the issue of just punishment inflicted in righteous anger remained as the defining contexts for Christian thinking about emotion in the sixteenth century and afterwards, even as Christian theology shifted its emphasis from God’s anger to God’s love.

Centuries after Luther, Christian thinking about anger remains preoccupied with its management. Muslims were deeply engaged in devising theories and practical regimens for anger control as well, but Muslims tended to frame that project with regard to mercy. Mercy, especially in the form of forgiveness, was the antidote to anger in Islamic thought. While Christian theology also attended to mercy, theological discussions of anger relied less on imagining emotional counterweights and more on puzzling out how anger could exist in the first place. There was a comparative privileging of questions about ontology and metaphysics in Christian writing about anger – is it disease or is it natural? – as opposed to Muslim thinking, which, while sophisticated in some ways that Christian theorizing was not, focused on legal practice. It foregrounded the means to manage anger in everyday life, and the relation of anger to legal justice.

In the twenty-first century, in an era of “the triumph of the therapeutic,” it would be hard to find any religious group, large or small, that was not committed in some way to anger management. Christian anger therapy groups are

<sup>244</sup> Christopher Ellwood, “A Singular Example of the Wrath of God: The Use of Sodom in Sixteenth-century Exegesis,” *Harvard Theological Review* 98 (2005), 67–93.

<sup>245</sup> Susan C. Karant-Nunn, “The Wrath of Martin Luther: Anger and Charisma in the Reformer,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 48 (2017), 909.

<sup>246</sup> Luther Quoted in Karant-Nunn, 915. <sup>247</sup> Luther quoted in Karant-Nunn, 918.

widely advertised online, as are Muslim and Jewish ones. They speak directly to the messiness of anger: “The human capacity to be angry is part of the *imago dei*. Like God, humans experience the emotion of anger. But the fall has corrupted human anger and, when ignited by selfish desires, it becomes a destructive, sometimes deadly, force.”<sup>248</sup>

### 3.6 Anger in Judaism

When the Pauline *Letter to the Ephesians* enjoined readers to “be angry but do not sin” (Eph 4:26), it was lifting that exact language from the Septuagint version of Psalm 4:4 (LXX 4:5).<sup>249</sup> Jewish thinking about anger, like Christian, was influenced by the ideas of the ancient philosophers. But Jewish writers developed a distinctive framework for their conceptualizations of righteous and inappropriate anger. Christian writers from the outset were deeply engaged in making philosophical sense of anger through engagements with the philosophers and adoption of their discursive styles. So also was the case for Philo and his immediate circle. But most Jewish writings about anger, while feeling the influence of the philosophers, constructed anger more forthrightly in terms of power, status, and gender, and illustrated their understandings of it with reference to stories of actors’ conduct in social orders more than through resort to philosophical arguments. Those stories frequently included references to bodily signs of anger, with an emphasis on anger as affect to be observed in its bodily manifestations. Eventually, Jewish writers engaged more directly with the philosophical ideas that were mediated through Christian theology. And by the time of Maimonides in the twelfth century there was a considerable body of Jewish reflection on the nature and place of anger articulated in the discursive styles favored by Christian and some Muslim theologians and legal scholars.

In the Hebrew Bible, words for anger occur over three hundred times. The noun that occurs most commonly (140 times), in texts that express anger in humans and in God, is *‘apayīm*, which translates to “nose” or “nostrils.”<sup>250</sup> Other words include *hārōn*, to denote divine rage, and *za‘am*, for indignation. Occurring a little less than a hundred times is *hēmā*, which refers to human or divine wrath. Other words, occurring sparingly, connote anger in connection to

<sup>248</sup> Gary F. Hallquist, “Equipping Selected Members of Colonial Baptist Church to Develop a Christian Approach to Dealing with Anger,” PhD dissertation, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (2019), 9–10.

<sup>249</sup> The language of Psalm 4:4 is rendered in the Septuagint: ὀργίσεσθε, καὶ μὴ ἀμαρτάνετε· ἂ λέγετε ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν, ἐπὶ ταῖς κοιταῖς ὑμῶν κατανύγητε (LXX 4:5).

<sup>250</sup> A discussion of the terms is in Nissim Amzallag, “What Are the ‘Long Nostrils’ of YHWH?” *Religions* 8 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090190>.

curses, aggravation, indignation, heat, humiliation, and noise.<sup>251</sup> Verbs and nouns having to do with anger intend an object of anger, and so are transitive. Divine and human figures are angry at something. The vast majority of anger words refer to the anger of God. A little over one quarter refers to human anger.<sup>252</sup>

The wrath of God in the Hebrew Bible takes a variety of forms, but typically is defined in language that underscores its exceptional force and often its complexity as well, as in Nahum 1:4, which entwines several qualities of God's anger: "Who can withstand his indignation? Who can endure his burning anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, even rocks are shattered before him." The keen Jewish sense of physical affect – as in the place of trembling and laughing in Jewish accounts of feeling – is apparent in the depiction of the wrath of God. The nostrils of God redden, enlarge, snort, become hot, and blow hard, pouring out his wrath. His anger is like fire, which destroys that which smells bad to him, such as the stench of idolaters who betray the covenant and become "a smoke in my nostrils, a fire that burns all day" (Isaiah 65:5). The nose of God is the site of anger – and for life-giving breath as well<sup>253</sup> – and it is through the nose that heat and fire emerge as the rage and wrath of God, so that, "smoke went up from his nostrils, and devouring fire from his mouth; glowing coals flamed forth from him" (Psalm 18:8).

The anger of God is a response to the stench in God's nostrils that prompts a violent and overwhelming physical response. That sense of the inescapable physical reality of anger is present as well in humans. It frames "the view that anger is a sentiment that takes control of a person. Hence, the emotion itself is grammatically construed as the subject of action (e.g., הרה, fury burns)." Texts do not depict the deity as angry per se, but rather that "the deity's rage is bursting; the king is not described as becoming furious, but rather the fury of the king is raging, or, a person is not burning of anger, but rather someone's nose is burning with anger."<sup>254</sup> Persons who express anger are led by affect. Their anger wells up in their bodies before issuing in words and actions.

Anger is the response to an insult. Persons and communities feel the wrath of God when they do not fulfill their obligations under the covenant, or when they insult God, or otherwise act in a way not in accord with their place as obedient

<sup>251</sup> Gary A. Herion, "Wrath of God," in David Noel Freedman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 6 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 990–991; Ellen van Wolde, "Sentiments as Culturally Constructed Emotions: Anger and Love in the Hebrew Bible," *Biblical Interpretation* 16 (2008), 7–8.

<sup>252</sup> van Wolde, 8; Bruce E. Baloiian, *Anger in the Old Testament* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 5.

<sup>253</sup> In OT literature, a short nose especially is for a short tempered person. A long nose can be for someone who is calm or merciful.

<sup>254</sup> van Wolde, 13.

servants of a magisterially powerful divine overlord. In such cases, the wrath of God is exercised in judgment, revenge, and punishment: “I will not keep silent, but I will repay” (Isaiah 65:6). Such a depiction of the righteous anger of God rested on a cultural foundation that often sharply limited the legitimate performance of anger to royalty. If “the dominant emotion discourse in antiquity reserved the emotion of anger for the powerful, including men and kings,”<sup>255</sup> anger in the Hebrew Bible followed closely upon that tradition.

Kings and gods became angry when insulted or humiliated. Pre-Jewish texts report the unleashing of divine anger following incidences of a community breaking its oaths or behaving sacrilegiously. The anger of persons without status typically appeared in ancient literature as narrations of illegitimate anger, and, in some cases, doubly an offense when directed against gods or rulers. Reports of such anger typically were “a matter more of official policy than of private sentiment,”<sup>256</sup> a matter less about passion than a performance of duty. The anger of Moses was righteous. Crucially, it was *ritual* anger, an emotion constructed in connection with the broader purpose of maintenance of the social body. The anger of the prophets similarly was licit because the prophets spoke on behalf of God

Jews could legally express anger when they did so in collective struggle against the enemies who insulted their God. In such cases, texts cast the situation as one in which “Jewish anger does not represent a belief in their own power but rather in their commitment to God, the only source of power.” In the chronicles of Jewish warfare against their second century BCE Seleucid enemies there is an exemplary text in 1 Maccabees that “celebrates Hasmonean anger as a central emotion guiding their actions on behalf of God.”<sup>257</sup>

Anger was gendered. The emphasis on status order that determined righteous anger as the prerogative of royalty was felt as well in the social order that granted to men privileges that were not extended to women. In Greek and Latin sources, as well as Hebrew and Aramaic, women were not capable of executing revenge and punishment upon those whose offenses required it. Such work required male power. In the Hebrew Bible, anger is not a part of the emotional repertoire of the female subject partly because women were coded as lacking aggressiveness.<sup>258 259</sup>

<sup>255</sup> Ari Mermelstein, *Power and Emotion in Ancient Judaism: Community and Identity in Formation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 39.

<sup>256</sup> Herion, 995.

<sup>257</sup> Mermelstein, *Power and Emotion in Ancient Judaism: Community and Identity in Formation*, 122–123. He interprets 1 Macc 1–6.

<sup>258</sup> de Wolde, 14. Mermelstein, 64.

<sup>259</sup> Mermelstein writes: “Legitimate displays of anger were therefore reserved for groups positioned to exact revenge; powerless groups, such as slaves and women, did not have access to legitimate forms of anger” (71).

The Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud evidence a limited vocabulary for discussing anger.<sup>260</sup> Yet in the centuries following the fall of the Second Temple (70 CE), the collections of rabbinic teachings that made up the Mishnah and Gemara included dozens of stories about the anger of the sages. The status of the sages vis a vis their students and interlocutors permitted their anger as justifiable. The sources discussing the professional lives of the sages “see anger as an appropriate reaction, especially towards inferiors who do not properly treat a superior.”<sup>261</sup> Public disrespect of a sage was repaid in anger. But anger was not acceptable in the home, in relations with a wife or children, or with parents.<sup>262</sup> In Talmudic literature, stories about anger are about interpersonal engagements. There is little philosophizing about anger, little engagement with the kinds of analytical discourses of pagan and Christian philosophy that were shaping Christian ideas about anger. There was a limited rabbinic vocabulary for discussing interiority in relation to feeling. To borrow Mirguet’s words, “the realms of action and social relations take prominence, with less attention paid to the inner life.”<sup>263</sup>

Later Jewish writers adapted rabbinic teachings to their times. Maimonides read deeply in ancient philosophy and was especially engaged with the *Nicomachean Ethics*.<sup>264</sup> His thinking about pride and humility, honor, courage, and self-esteem all were worked out in intellectual debate with Aristotle, and Maimonides at times pointedly rejected Aristotle’s arguments, as in the case of the nature and place of pride in civic life.<sup>265</sup> In writing about anger, Maimonides developed an approach that had been explored by medieval Jewish philosophers that often distanced them from biblical and rabbinic arguments,<sup>266</sup> and framed understandings of anger in everyday life, apart from considerations of status, as matters of physical passion, willful control, and piety.

The *Guide to the Perplexed* was an intellectual landmark “engaged in a critical dialogue with Aristotle, almost invariably disagreeing with him, but indebted to Aristotle for his mode of discourse, argument forms, and philosophical

<sup>260</sup> Joel Gereboff, “Talmudic Stories about Anger and Annoyed Rabbis,” in Alan Avery-Peck, Bruce D. Chilton, William Scott Green, and Gary Porton, eds., *A Legacy of Learning: Essays in Honor of Jacob Neusner* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 100.

<sup>261</sup> Gereboff, 108. <sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 109. <sup>263</sup> Mirguet, 588.

<sup>264</sup> Oliver Leaman, “Introduction to the Study of Medieval Jewish Philosophy,” in Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 12–15.

<sup>265</sup> Daniel H. Frank, “Humility as a Virtue: A Maimonidean Critique of Aristotle’s Ethics,” in Eric L. Ormsby, ed., *Moses Maimonides and His Time* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1989), 88–99.

<sup>266</sup> See for example David Shatz, “The Biblical and Rabbinic Background to Jewish Philosophy,” in Frank and Leaman, eds., 16–37, and Sarah Pessin, “Jewish Neoplatonism: Being above Being and Divine Emanation in Solomon ibn Gabriol and Isaac Israeli,” in Frank and Leaman, eds., 91–110.

vocabulary.”<sup>267</sup> Yet Maimonides struggled in trying to join his Aristotelian ideas about anger with concepts bequeathed to him from rabbinic writing. Where Aristotle made inirascibility – too little anger – a vice, Maimonides made it a virtue. He pointed out that God acted for the good of humanity as he guided people to ethical conduct, at times through punishment, in what only *appeared* like passionate anger. So also could a person imitate God’s lack of feeling of anger and perform in a way that corrected the errors of others, including burning alive an enemy of the state “without being annoyed or angry or ill-disposed towards him.”<sup>268</sup> In other words, “for Maimonides the ideal in the sphere of anger is to *display* anger when necessary, but never to *feel* it.”<sup>269</sup> His conceptualization accordingly broke with early Jewish understandings of anger that stressed bodily affect, replacing that emphasis with the notion of a highly cognized anger that was performed on script rather than bursting from the nose in an outpouring of wrath. For Judaism, that has meant that the arc of historical development since Maimonides has been an understanding of anger in connection to forgiveness, generosity, and justice.<sup>270</sup>

#### 4 Mixed Emotions

Western classificatory schemes of human feeling long have labored to identify perceived differences in feeling as a movement among various discrete emotions: sorrow, joy, grief, love, hate, and many more experiences. The “tree of emotions,” an image with a long history of recurrence in Western philosophical writings, pictured the trunk, limbs, and branches of a tree as illustration of the concept that emotions might spring from the same limb, but, as different branches extending from that limb, nevertheless were distinct states. Such a conceptualization of discrete emotions was largely a linguistic foray, an effort to identify all of the words that were used to describe feelings and to differentiate one from the other. It confessed the historical conditioning of Western thinking about feeling, and, joined as it was to centuries of religious arguments about feeling, it influenced ongoing theorization of emotions as basic, hardwired, and independent each from the other.

Emotions, however, often are mixed. A growing body of research has provided strong evidence for how the theory of basic emotions is flawed in its understanding of human feeling, and has offered instances in which emotions

<sup>267</sup> Daniel H. Frank, “Maimonides and Medieval Jewish Aristotelianism,” in Frank and Leaman, eds., 144.

<sup>268</sup> Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, I.54, trans. Chaim Rabin (Cambridge: Hackett, 1995), 75.

<sup>269</sup> Daniel H. Frank, “Anger as a Vice: A Maimonidean Critique of Aristotle’s Ethics.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (1990), 269–281.

<sup>270</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Anger and Forgiveness: Resentment, Generosity, Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

are mixed, blended, simultaneous, and even contradictory in the same moment of experience. It has for some time been evident that it is more appropriate to conceive of “emotions as complex blends, rather than discrete assignments”<sup>271</sup> and that “the boundaries between categories of emotion are fuzzy rather than discrete.”<sup>272</sup> Scientific research now reports on the “simultaneous occurrence of multiple emotions”<sup>273</sup> and how “our emotions don’t have lives of their own, but mutually influence each other across time.”<sup>274</sup> Discussion of discrete emotions is still useful, because there are times when one emotion predominates, and in understanding historical discourses about emotion, it is sometimes advantageous to follow the lead of the ancient cataloguers in tracking the development of a historical concept relating to feeling. But there nevertheless remains “the fact that emotions are seldom experienced in a pure form. Very often it is a rather complex blend of feelings”<sup>275</sup> and that blending is in fact so common that in some experimental research “only exceptionally, respondents report just one emotion.”<sup>276</sup> In the case of love, for example, it is often possible to see how “multiple emotions take place simultaneously to form one overarching emotion.”<sup>277</sup> Again, there can be “different levels of emotional ambivalence and tension”<sup>278</sup> as a person experiences a complex of feelings, but “mixed emotions are a robust, measurable, and non-artifactual experience.”<sup>279</sup> Mixed feelings “simultaneously may result either from the rapid alternation between emotions or the co-activation of two emotions.”<sup>280</sup> There is “no autonomic fingerprint for each emotion – feelings are jumbled up, shifting, alternating, and

<sup>271</sup> Emily Mower, Maja. J. Mataric and Shrikanth Narayanan, “A Framework for Automatic Human Emotion Classification Using Emotion Profiles,” in *IEEE Transactions on Audio, Speech, and Language Processing* 19 (2011), 1058.

<sup>272</sup> Alan S. Cowen and Dacher Keltner, “Self-report Captures 27 Distinct Categories of Emotion Bridged by Continuous Gradients,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 114 (2017), E7900.

<sup>273</sup> Shikha Jain and Krishna Asawa. “EMIA: Emotion Model for Intelligent Agent,” *Journal of Intelligent Systems* 24 (2015), 452.

<sup>274</sup> Madeline Lee Pe and Peter Kuppens, “The Dynamic Interplay between Emotions in Daily Life: Augmentation, Blunting, and the Role of Appraisal Overlap,” *Emotion* 12 (2012), 1320.

<sup>275</sup> Ad J. J. M. Vingerhoets, A. Jan W. Boelhouwer, Miranda A. L. Van Tilburg, and Guus L. Van Heck, “The Situational and Emotional Context of Adult Crying,” in Ad J. J. M. Vingerhoets and Randolph R. Cornelius, eds., *Adult Crying: A Psychosocial Approach* (London: Brunner-Routledge, 2001), 8.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>277</sup> B. L. Frederickson, “Love,” in Lisa Feldman Barrett, Michale M. Lewis and Jeanette M. Haviland-Jones, eds., *Handbook of Emotions*, 4th ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2016), 847.

<sup>278</sup> Luis Ocejja, and Pilar Carrera, “Beyond a Single Pattern of Mixed Emotional Experience: Sequential, Prevalence, Inverse, and Simultaneous,” *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* 25 (2009), 58. See also: Jack W. Brehm and Anca M. Miron, “Can the Simultaneous Experience of Opposing Emotions Really Occur?” *Motivation and Emotion* 30 (2006), 13–30.

<sup>279</sup> Raul Berrios, Peter Totterdell, and Stephen Kellett, “Eliciting Mixed Emotions: A Meta-analysis Comparing Models, Types, and Measures,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (2015), 1.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*, 3–4.



simultaneously different.”<sup>281</sup> In other words, “it is likely that multiple emotional responses to any situation may be more the rule than the exception.”<sup>282</sup>

Monotheistic traditions long have recognized and encouraged mixed emotions. It may be the case, in fact, that “multiple emotions are present in each religion and each ritual.”<sup>283</sup> The Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur’an relate numerous incidences in which persons experience mixed emotions. The *Psalms*, which figure prominently in the emotional cultures of Judaism and Christianity, and have been a frequent topic in the works of Muslim scholars, mix moods and feelings in often rapid sequences, one emotion overlapping with another, as those are layered in the poem. Indeed, “the mood changes in psalms may be expected. People often oscillate between methods of emotion regulation, and emotional experiences can be exceptionally complicated and contradictory. We may indulge in lament and dwell on our suffering, then distract ourselves from the pain with hope of a better future grounded in memories of a happier past. In response to distress, we may feel mixed emotions that are not easily disentangled into a linear progression.”<sup>284</sup> The *Song of Songs*, an erotic poem in the same literary category as the *Psalms* – that is, a plotless collection of short segments having to do with love, praise, and longing – moves in its eight short chapters through a multitude of emotions, at times blending them in surprising ways. One analysis tracks the mixing of emotions as a blend of eight distinct but overlapping experiences as the *Song* progresses: anger, love, hatred, boredom, amusement, admiration, awe, and contempt.<sup>285</sup>

The experience of the Muslim Hajj is a similar instance of mixed emotions. An academic survey of recent participants drew the same conclusion as observers had done for centuries: “More people reported feeling happy after they completed the journey. Interestingly, more people reported feeling sad when they have to leave for home. This highlights the uniqueness of Hajj where people experienced intense and mixed emotions (i.e., happy and sad at the same

<sup>281</sup> Erike H Siegel, Molly K. Sands, Wim Van den Noortgate et al., “Emotion Fingerprints or Emotion Populations? A Meta-analytic Investigation of Autonomic Features of Emotion Categories,” *Psychological Bulletin* 144 (2018), 344.

<sup>282</sup> Michael Lewis, *The Rise of Conscious and the Development of Emotional Life* (New York: Guilford, 2014), 51.

<sup>283</sup> Jacques Johannes Strydom, “The Role of Emotion in Religion,” PhD Dissertation, University of Praetoria, 2021.

<sup>284</sup> David A. Bosworth, *House of Weeping: the Motif of Tears in Akkadian and Hebrew Prayers* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2019), 95. Bosworth’s study is the most theoretically sophisticated study of emotion in early Hebrew texts.

<sup>285</sup> Gabriel Levy, “A New Method for Analyzing Emotions in Jewish Texts,” in Gabriel Levy, ed., *Judaism and Emotion: Texts, Performance, Experience* (New York: Peter Lang, 2013), 157–158.

time).<sup>286</sup> One might add that the pilgrimage itself involved many other emotions, including love, hope, despair, shame, joy, and awe.

In Christianity, as in Judaism and Islam, the mixing of emotions has been a matter of common acknowledgement since the early Christian community. When a Father of the Orthodox Church, St. John of Damascus, expressed the view that “with pain earth’s joys are mingled,”<sup>287</sup> he was commenting not only on the complexity of struggle in life but specifically on the complexity of emotional life, just as was the *Primitive Baptist Hymnal*, centuries later, in affirming how “sweet joy with grief is mixed” in living the Christian life.<sup>288</sup> The “Wonder Books” of Christians and Muslims, such as that of Mirza Abul Hasan Khan’s discussed above, typically conjured a wide range of imbricated emotions. Zurich pastor Johann Jakob Wick’s own sixteenth-century wonder book collected scores of reports of earthquakes, fires, famines, floods, wars, and avalanches and “its purpose was to elicit in its readers emotions of wonder, mixed with anger, penitence, grief and fear; to have readers wonder at the awesome, and also terrifying, events that Wick, his correspondents and other reports” chronicled.<sup>289</sup> Such terrible events, in the view of some, showed the hand of a God who was himself emotionally complex. Writing about natural wonders/disasters in seventeenth-century Coventry, historian Alexandra Walsham observed: “The God they envisaged fused the implacable Jehovah of the Hebrew Scriptures and the tender father evoked in the Christian gospels and epistles: *he had mixed emotions.*”<sup>290</sup>

#### 4.1 Weeping in Christianity

The mixed emotions in monotheistic traditions can be observed in performances of weeping. Weeping is often a matter of clusters of emotions rather than discrete ones. To take the simplest of examples: when persons weep at weddings, they typically are both happy and sad, and might be experiencing

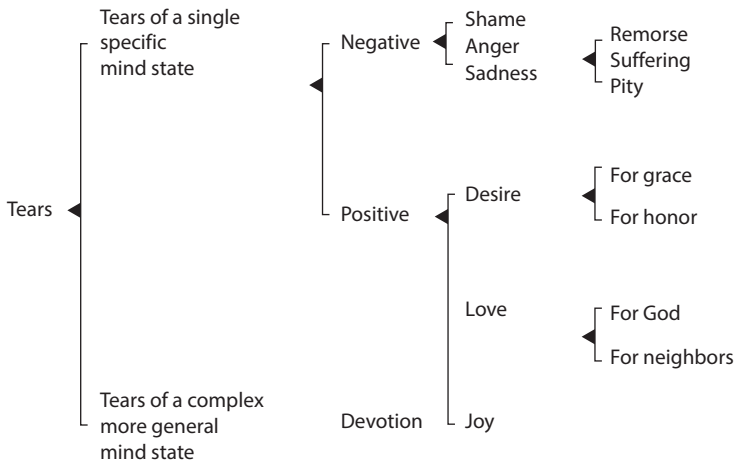
<sup>286</sup> Mohamad, Zhooriyati Sehu, Intan H. M. Hashim, and Zulkarnain Ahmad Hatta, “Emotional Experiences during Muslim Spiritual Journey,” *Proceedings of Universiti Sains Malaysia* (Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia: Universiti Sains Malaysia, 2015), 276.

<sup>287</sup> *Hymns and Poetry of the Eastern Churches*, ed., Bernhard Pick (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1908), 124.

<sup>288</sup> Julian Clifford Jaynes, “Sweet Joy with Grief is Mixed,” in Milton J. Sears and Harry Jack Ausmus, eds., *The Primitive Baptist Hymnal: A Choice Collection of Hymns and Tunes of Early and Late Composition* (St. Louis: John T. Smith and Co., 1881), 19.

<sup>289</sup> Charles Zika, “Disaster, Apocalypse, Emotions and Time in Sixteenth-Century Pamphlets” in Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika, eds., *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400–1700* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 70.

<sup>290</sup> Alexandra Walsham, “Deciphering Divine Wrath and Displaying Godly Sorrow: Providentialism and Emotion in Early Modern England,” Jennifer Spinks and Charles Zika, eds. *Disaster, Death and the Emotions in the Shadow of the Apocalypse, 1400–1700* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 24.



**Figure 4** The classification of emotions experienced in weeping by Gisbertus Voetius from *De praktijk der godzaligheid* (Utrecht: De Banier, 1995, (1664)), 192.

additional emotions as well, such as fear, or even remorse and desire.<sup>291</sup> In crying, “it is often just such mixed emotions or competing desires – fear mixed with desire, hope mixed with despair – that can trigger the release of tears.”<sup>292</sup> Crying is a performance of “mingled feelings.”<sup>293</sup>

The seventeenth-century Dutch Calvinist theologian Gisbertus Voetius, best known for his furious disputes with Descartes, recognized the complexity of feeling involved in weeping and made a chart to illustrate it. His scheme included nine names of emotions as well as their varying motivations, including weeping for God, neighbor, honor, and so forth. His chart of emotional states was but one example of how, from the shortest verse in the New Testament, “And Jesus wept” (John 11:35), came forth a long history of Christian theories about weeping and emotion. Similar traditions animated Judaism and Islam. At times, weeping as a religious exercise became a broader cultural practice, performed in a multitude of occasions both recognizably religious and not,<sup>294</sup> and at certain times performed most conspicuously: “The Middle Ages were saturated with tears. Their rivers of tears haven’t quite dried up even today, and whoever has an ear for pain can still hear their

<sup>291</sup> W. Gerrod Parrott, “The Heart and the Head: Everyday Conceptions of Being Emotional,” in James A. Russell, J. M. Fernández-Dols, A. S. R. Manstead, and J. C. Wellenkamp, eds., *Everyday Conceptions of Emotion* (Dordrecht: Springer, 1995), 76.

<sup>292</sup> Tom Lutz, *The Natural and Cultural History of Tears* (New York: Norton, 1999), 22.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>294</sup> Thomas Dixon, *Weeping Britannia: Portrait of a Nation in Tears* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Dixon comments on mixed emotions as a compulsion to tears in England (158).

lamentations.”<sup>295</sup> In the late medieval and early modern periods, weeping came to be formalized in ritual that prompted, regulated, and shaped the performance of tears, in Christian enactments during Passion Week and other important events in the religious calendar, as well as in rituals at court, in public spaces such as the market and cemetery, and on certain regularly occurring social occasions.<sup>296</sup> Weepers experienced clusters of feelings, and sometimes in ways that historians find difficult to sort – emotions that “we cannot even name, that are not always clearly identified, even by the person who is weeping.”<sup>297</sup> The self-reporting fifteenth-century mystic Margery Kempe wept tears that routinely joined compunction, joy, fear, and love.<sup>298</sup>

Charles Wesley, whose Methodist movement early on acquired a reputation for the vigorous weeping of its membership, penned hymns about Christian tears: “at heart with grief oppressed/. . . The penitent desire, With true sincerity of woe/. . . let me feel my load of shame,/And groan my want of love:/Low in the deepest deep/ My humbled spirit lay,/And give me there to cry, and weep/My pensive life away.”<sup>299</sup> Wesley brought together grief, desire, penitence, sincerity, shame, love, humility, and despair in the emotional experience depicted in the song. Such comprehensiveness – a truly multiple emotional experience – was not at all unusual in much of Christian history, and certainly not in Methodism. For Wesley, the soul itself was constituted by mixed emotions in a Christian who “is capable not only of thinking, but likewise of love, hatred, joy, sorrow, desire, fear, hope, etc., and a whole train of other inward emotions which are commonly called ‘passions’ or ‘affections’. They are styled, by a general appellation, ‘the will’, and are mixed and diversified a thousand ways. And they seem to be the only spring of action in that inward principle I call ‘the soul’.”<sup>300</sup>

For Wesley, Paul was the model for the mixing of emotions in tears. Commenting on Acts 20:19, Wesley exhorted: “See the picture of a faithful servant! The Lord – Whose the church is, with all humility, and with tears, and

<sup>295</sup> Emil M. Cioran, *Tears and Saints* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 29; Jessie Gutsell, “The Gift of Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination of Western Medieval Christianity,” *Anglican Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (2015): 239–253.

<sup>296</sup> William A. Christian Jr., “Provoked Religious Weeping in Early Modern Spain,” in John Corrigan, ed., *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 33–50.

<sup>297</sup> Piroska Nagy, “Religious Weeping as Ritual in the Medieval West,” *Social Analysis* 48 (2004), 122.

<sup>298</sup> *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans., Barry Windeatt (New York: Penguin, 2000).

<sup>299</sup> Charles Wesley, “LXXVIII. The Same.-Hymn 28,” in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, Vol. 4, (London: Wesleyan Methodist Conference Office, 1869), 427.

<sup>300</sup> John Wesley, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, Frank Baker and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976), 4.22.

trials. . . . These passages laid together supply us with the genuine character of St. Paul. Holy tears, from those who seldom weep on account of natural occurrences, are no mean specimen of the efficacy and proof of the truth of Christianity. Yet joy is well consistent therewith, ver. 24. The same person may be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing.”<sup>301</sup> As one observer has noted, “Methodists shed tears of mixed feelings of shame, fear, remorse, and joy for either damnation or blessing.”<sup>302</sup> The English Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon, who thought that Wesley and George Whitefield (the latter also an enthusiastic promoter of and model for Christian weeping) should be added to the list of the twelve apostles, carried forward Wesley’s thinking about tears, attaching it to the emergent scientific thinking of the late nineteenth century. Portraying the emotional experience of a believer, Spurgeon explained that: “if you will take one of his tears, and put it under a microscope, or analyze its component parts, you will find that . . . joy is mingled with his sorrow.”<sup>303</sup>

Where Spurgeon might broach joy and sorrow in the same teardrop, other writers proposed differentiations between kinds of tears, all the while admitting the shiftiness of those categories and the possibility of their overlapping at times. A homily preached in London c. 1200 sorted tears into four types: *lacrimae compunctionis* were comprised of saltwater wept for guilt; *lacrimae compassionis* were like snow-water cried out of compassion felt for fellow Christians; *lacrimae peregrinationis* were tears that like well-water and arose from weariness in the world; and *lacrimae contemplationis*, tears like dew-water, were shed out of longing for heaven.<sup>304</sup>

Another who explicated weeping was Catherine of Siena, known her *Dialogue of Divine Providence* (c. 1378), in which she addressed tears that “come from the heart.”<sup>305</sup> Catherine proposed five stages of weeping, declaring that “the soul passes through these states of tears” on its way to union with God. First was weeping that was indicative that “a heart is in pain,” expressed in despairing tears of “wicked men of the world,” cried out of a sense of damnation. Second were “tears caused by fears” of divine punishment. Third were tears that people will “weep for their very sweetness” as they turn to God, but

<sup>301</sup> John Wesley’s *Bible Commentary Notes – Acts 20*, [www.godrules.net/library/wesley/wesleyact20.htm](http://www.godrules.net/library/wesley/wesleyact20.htm).

<sup>302</sup> Han Zhao, “‘Holy Shame Shall Warm My Heart’: Shame and Protestant Emotions in Early Modern Britain,” *Cultural and Social History: The Journal of the Social History Society* 18 (2021), 11.

<sup>303</sup> Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Christian at the Cross,” in Spurgeon, *Pictures from Pilgrim’s Progress* (London: Counted Faithful, 2019), 55.

<sup>304</sup> Anonymous, “Sermo in Ps. CXXVI. 6,” in Richard Morris, ed., *Old English Homilies and Homiletic Treatises*, (London: Early English Text Society, 1868), 155–158.

<sup>305</sup> *The Dialogue of St. Catherine of Siena*, trans., Algar Thorold (London: Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1907) 197.

such weeping is still “imperfect,” that is, carrying the vestiges of previous stages. Fourth are “the tears of those who have arrived at the perfect love of their neighbour,” and their “weeping is perfect.” Fifth, and finally, are “tears of sweetness let fall with great peace.”<sup>306</sup> In her detailed exposition of the five kinds of weeping, Catherine explained how tears were expressive of a wide range of emotions of the soul: fear, hatred, grief, love, hope, joy, sorrow, compassion, tenderness, passion, self-hating, and ecstasy.<sup>307</sup> Those emotions could appear in various ways throughout the five stages of tears.

## 4.2 Weeping in Islam

Weeping is widespread in Muslim literature and common in religious practice. Tears “shape the emotional grid that forms part of Muslim religious and communal identities.”<sup>308</sup> Weeping is sometimes found in places where one might not expect it: Abū Muṣ‘ab Zarqāwī, the founder of ISIS, known as al-dhabbāh, “the Slaughterer,” also was known al-bakkā, “the Weeper.” According to one report, “weeping is widespread in contemporary jihadi groups, and those who cry are seen as better warriors for it.”<sup>309</sup>

A striking instance of the centrality of weeping in Muslim religious practice is the dramatic expression of emotion at Karbala, where Muslims on pilgrimage mourn the death of the Prophet but especially the martyrdom in battle of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of the Prophet. Shi’a Muslims come to Husayn’s tomb and there weep and wail over his death, and over the betrayal of his family. Muslim commentators have elaborately detailed the purposes and meanings of weeping at Karbala, characterizing it as an act of devotion that can bring physical healing, longevity, mental health, and enlightenment. Not weeping at Karbala on the other hand might lead to disease and mental illness. And beyond pilgrimage, weeping for Husayn can be an everyday habit of piety. For Shi’a Muslims, “the mention of Husain (A.S.) ought to be an essential routine of our life and that weeping. . . is one of the noblest forms of worship.”<sup>310</sup>

In Islam, weeping has a place alongside the act of falling down, and is linked to various affects, and especially awe. Those who hear the truth of Islam “fall down upon their faces prostrating. . . . And they fall down upon their faces

<sup>306</sup> *Idid.*, 188. <sup>307</sup> *Ibid.*, 189–191. See also Cioran, *Tears and Saints*, 29.

<sup>308</sup> Linda G. Jones, “‘He Cried and Made Others Cry’: Crying as a Sign of Pietistic Authenticity or Deception in Medieval Islamic Preaching,” in Elina Gertsman, ed., *Crying in the Middle Ages: Tears of History* (London: Routledge, 2013), 126.

<sup>309</sup> Thomas Hegghammer, “Weeping in Modern Jihadi Groups,” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 31 (2020), 358, 359.

<sup>310</sup> Maulana Syed Mohammed Ameen Sahib, *The Importance of Weeping and Wailing* (Karachi: Peer Mahomed Ebrahim Trust, 1973), 9. See also Adam R. Gaiser, *Sectarianism in Islam: The Umma Divided* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 86–125.

weeping” (Q 17:108–109). In *Surat Mai’da*, even the disbelievers are tearful when confronted by truth: “When they hear what has been sent down to the Messenger, their eyes fill with tears because of the truth that they recognise” (Q 5:83). Weeping (root: b-k-y) is mentioned seven times in the Qur’an, and in hundreds of hadith, such as when the Prophet enjoined that “No man who weeps for fear of Allah will be touched by the Fire until the milk goes back into the udders.”<sup>311</sup> And it is present throughout Muslim writing, visible, for example, in religious heroes and holy personages, where it is modeled in various ways. In the *Book of Religious Scrupulosity*, ‘Abd al-Malik b. Habib (d. 238/853) reported on several traditions about King David and his tearful repentance before God, including a tradition associated with Wahb b. Munabbih: “Dāwūd lived very long and did not drink water without mixing it with his tears and did not break his fast on his bed without making it wet from his tears, to the point where the drapes did not dry.”<sup>312</sup>

Muslim authorities and exhorters over centuries urged that recitation of the Qur’an be accompanied by weeping. A historical narrative attributed to a report of al-Ghazali recounts: “I recited the Qur’an to the Messenger of God (peace be upon him) . . . and he said to me, “Oh righteous one, this is reciting! So where is the weeping?”<sup>313</sup> The medieval hadith scholar al-Nawawi affirmed that “Weeping is the mark of those intimate with God [‘ārīfīn] and the sign of the devout worshippers of God.”<sup>314</sup> A modern commentator and translator of the Qur’an similarly summarizes the affect associated with recitation: “A feeling of earnest humility comes to the man who realizes how, in spite of his own unworthiness, he is brought, by God’s mercy, into touch with the most sublime Truths. Such a man is touched with the deepest emotion, which finds its outlet in tears.”<sup>315</sup> A story attributed to al-Jahiz reinforced the message of *Surat Mai’da* about the affect experienced by non-Muslims when they heard the Qur’an recited: “Al-Tayyib al-Basrī, a Jew, wept on hearing the recitation of Abu l-Xawx, and was asked, how is it that you wept on hearing the Book of God, and you don’t believe its truth? He said, verily the heart-rending emotion [šajā] of it made me weep.”<sup>316</sup>

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 364.

<sup>312</sup> Quoted in Mateusz Wilk, *The Character of David in Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 80.

<sup>313</sup> Quoted in Kristina Nelson, *The Art of Reciting the Qur’an* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2001), 91.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>315</sup> *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān*, translated with notes by ‘Abdullah Yūsuf Alī, (Leicester: The Islamic Foundation, 2009), 289n.212.

<sup>316</sup> Quoted in Nelson, 94. The name printed as “Abu-l-Xawx,” which Nelson takes from al-Sa’id quoting al-Jahiz, might be Abu al-Khawkh.



It is widely observed that Sufis manifested their intense affect in weeping. But Muslims in general wept as they prayed. There were enough differences in their styles to prompt the involvement of jurists in determining acceptable practice.<sup>317</sup> And while Muslim preaching sometimes caused pious tears, it was possible that tears also could be a veil that concealed a heart that was not properly moved.<sup>318</sup> Muslim weeping was similar to Jewish and Christian weeping, but, again, there were differences, not the least of which was that many Muslims expected tears in routine matters of religious practice, from reading the Qur'an to praying.

Muslims wept mixed emotions. Ibn Jubayr, in describing his circuitous travels from Cordoba to Jerusalem in 1183–1185 numbers many occasions of weeping crowds, and the multiple emotions of the weepers (including himself). At the tomb of a saint in Cairo there was “awe-inspiring” weeping. At the *maqam* of Abraham, there were “flowing tears, eyes dissolved in weeping.” At another shrine “the tears of the contrite flowed, and you could hear nothing but the swell of voices in prayer and the sobs of the weeping. . . . never has there been seen such a day of weeping.” At the *ahram* of Muhammad, Ibn Jubayr “never saw a night of more tears and contrition than this.” As a crowd elsewhere responded to a sermon their “eyes poured forth their tears. . . .” that expressed “passion,” “eroticism,” “love,” “fear,” “penitence,” and awe. When his party reencountered previous traveling companions in a port, their friends were “joyful at our reunion, weeping for happiness, lost in amazement, and marveling.”<sup>319</sup> His accounts of weeping, moreover, were part of a travel narrative steeped in the tradition of the Arabic wonder tale, and as such exuded awe not only in reportage of weeping but with references to architectural feats and natural spectacles. In general, Muslim weeping was performed out of fear of God, but that fear was a combination of different feelings, and, in addition to those mentioned by Ibn Jubayr, weeping for fear could shade into mixtures of awe, reverence, grief, terror, sincerity, guilt, and shame.<sup>320</sup>

### 4.3 Weeping in Judaism

Jews weep, sometimes as they tremble, or even as they laugh. Just as Abū Muṣ'ab Zarqāwī was known both as the slaughterer of his enemies and as “the weeper,” so the Israelite warriors of *Judges* “all the people of Israel, the

<sup>317</sup> Marion Holmes Katz, *Prayer in Islamic Thought and Practice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 67–70.

<sup>318</sup> Linda G. Jones, “He Cried and Made Others Cry,” 102–135.

<sup>319</sup> Ibn Jubayr, *The Travels of Ibn Jubayr: A Medieval Journey from Cordoba to Jerusalem*, trans. Robert Broadhurst, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2019), 57, 100, 134, 200, 229, 250, 252, 382.

<sup>320</sup> Jones, 126–127.

whole army, went up to Bethel and wept” before going into victorious battle against the Benjaminites (Judges 20:26). Religious weeping in Judaism is much like the weeping in the other monotheistic traditions. Jewish weeping is ritual weeping, and as such it is conceptualized as efficacious by the weepers. Weeping enacts feeling, but it also represents specific cognitive states and locates the weeper within complex social cosmologies. The “scripted grief”<sup>321</sup> of Ezra 9–10 is an account of Ezra’s emotional display over the failure of the people of Israel to separate themselves from the profanity of their neighbors. Ezra tore his cloak and tunic and “was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites—men, women and children—gathered around him. They too wept bitterly” (Ezra 9:2, 10:1). As was the case with many analogous stories of weeping in Christian and Muslim literatures, Ezra’s prayer illustrates how “the performance of certain ritual behaviors is aimed at generating the desired emotional and cognitive state within the religious practitioner (i.e., grief) so that the display of emotions can further specific political and social aims.”<sup>322</sup> More directly important for its illustration of mixed emotions is the reported inventory of what Ezra felt as the people both wept and trembled: guilt, shame, disgrace, despair, humiliation, gratitude, and a feeling of the anger of God, who, himself, often weeps, sometimes in “secret chambers” (Jer. 13:17). Indeed, “the theme of God crying. . . is pervasive in Jewish literature.”<sup>323</sup>

In Judaism, “sometimes tears represent expressions of infinite yearnings and at other times, tokens of remorse and despair. The Jewish tear traditions often weave a fine tapestry around these poles.”<sup>324</sup> As those Jewish traditions navigated a course between joy and despair, trembling and laughter, they developed period-specific meanings. In the period narrated by the Hebrew Bible, tears often held multivalent meanings but tended to represent sadness, mourning, and distress. Following the destruction of the Second Temple, Talmudic sources to the seventh century built a case for tears as enactment of positive experiences, and indicative of joy. In the medieval and modern periods, tears in Jewish literature took on a more instrumental meaning, as means by which to open the heart to God and in so doing enable spiritual advancement. All such traditions were matters of public performance, and involved weeping in a variety of places, holy or not. Indeed, sometimes spaces became holy precisely

<sup>321</sup> Angela Kim Harkins, “The Pro-Social Role of Grief in Ezra’s Penitential Prayer,” *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016), 466.

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>323</sup> Herbert Basser, “Weeping in Jewish Sources,” in Patton and Hawley, eds., *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, 184.

<sup>324</sup> Basser, 185.



**Figure 5** Jeremiah, “the Weeping Prophet,” lamenting the destruction of Jerusalem. Rembrandt. 1630. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

because of the behavior of the weepers. In the sixteenth century, Suleiman the Magnificent opened a small section of the Western Wall of Jerusalem, proximate to the Temple Mount, to Jews for prayer. It subsequently became a site globally known for Jewish religious weeping, ostensibly over the loss of the Second Temple, by both women and men, who publicly displayed their “beautiful grief” and their hopes for a restoration of Israel. A nineteenth-century literary sketch of the Wailing Wall observed Jews: “weeping and bewailing the desolation which has come upon them, . . . it is beautiful and sincere; . . . and the real tears they shed come from their hearts and their souls, as well as from their eyes.”<sup>325</sup>

Alongside this general development of meanings of weeping were the mystical traditions associated with Kabbalah, which invested tears with great meaning.<sup>326</sup> The sixteenth-century mystic Isaac ben Solomon Luria, whose

<sup>325</sup> Lawrence Hutton, *Literary Landmarks of Jerusalem* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1895), 20.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 186–187; Elliot R. Wolfson, “Weeping, Death, and Spiritual Ascent in Sixteenth-Century Jewish Mysticism,” in John Corrigan, ed., *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 271–303.

teachings were fundamental to the development of Kabbalah, “would tell his students that he would cry as many tears as the [number of] hairs on his head with respect to each and every secret that was revealed to him from heaven. Similarly, when he wanted to reveal a secret to his disciples they did not want to give him permission until he prayed countless prayers and cried as many tears as the [number of] hairs on his head.”<sup>327</sup> Gods, angels, and rabbis all wept, and Jews took their cues from the behavior of those holy figures, not only imitating them, but also investing their trust in them precisely because they wept.<sup>328</sup>

Jews like other religious groups also sometimes conceptualized weeping as a process that unfolded in stages, as part of a Zoharic “transition through a distinct and emotional process, progressing stage by stage.”<sup>329</sup> But well before the *Zohar*, Jews had conceptualized the “complex of emotions” that came with weeping.<sup>330</sup> While some Jews discussed mixed emotions of weeping in connection with stages, other Jewish writers focused on the simultaneity of mixed emotions. The Hellenistic Jewish text *Joseph and Aseneth* (c. 200 BCE–200 CE), a fictional narrative concerning the conversion of an Egyptian priest’s daughter to the Hebrew religion of Joseph, whom she marries, understandably “abounds in emotion – especially fear, grief, surprise, anger, and rejoicing.”<sup>331</sup> There are times when the periodically weeping characters “feel surprised, overjoyed, grateful, and distressed, all in one flurry of feeling.”<sup>332</sup> At one point in the narrative, when Joseph has blessed her and indicated his willingness to receive her kiss, she weeps, according to the story, with a cluster of simultaneously experienced emotions. She “was filled with joy at Joseph’s blessing, and she went up in haste to her storey at the top and fell on her couch exhausted, because she felt *not only* happy, *but also* disturbed and very frightened; . . . And she wept bitterly. . . .”<sup>333</sup>

When Françoise Mirguet asks “What is an ‘Emotion’ in the Hebrew Bible?”<sup>334</sup> she raises an issue that has resonance for thinking about all the monotheistic religions. Emotion is at the center of religious life. It is both

<sup>327</sup> Wolfson, 289.

<sup>328</sup> Rebecca Lesses, “Eschatological Sorrow, Divine Weeping, and God’s Right Arm,” in April C. De Conick, ed., *Paradise Now: Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006), 265–283.

<sup>329</sup> Eitan Fishbane, “Tears of Disclosure: The Role of Weeping in Zoharic Narrative,” *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 11 (2002), 38–39.

<sup>330</sup> Tyler Smith, “Complexes of Emotions in Joseph and Aseneth,” *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 30, no. 3 (2021), 133–155.

<sup>331</sup> *Ibid.*, 141. <sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>333</sup> “Joseph and Aseneth,” Section 9:1–2, in H. F. D. Soparks, ed., *The Apocryphal Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 481.

<sup>334</sup> Françoise Mirguet, “What Is an ‘Emotion’ in the Hebrew Bible?” *Biblical Interpretation* 24 (2016), 442–465.

obvious and obscure. At times it appears with clarity in the words and actions of religious actors, while at other times it is woven so deeply into the practice of everyday life that it requires survey by a sharp analytical eye. In religious weeping, where multiple emotions typically are present, there is opportunity to observe and appreciate the complexity of emotional life in monotheistic religions. And there is opportunity as well to shape queries that disturb notions of feeling that rely exclusively on conceptualizations of emotions as hardwired, basic human endowments. There is invitation to initiate a stronger focus on the relation of thinking and feeling in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. There is provocation for renewed efforts to track similarities and differences in the social cosmologies, intellectual histories, and, especially, the ritual settings and dynamics prevalent in the three Abrahamic traditions. There is a call to explore the *space* of emotion in religion. And there is a chance to build back into historical understanding a more nuanced and generous understanding of the emotional human subjects who live their lives under the umbrella of monotheism.

## Acknowledgments

I thank Adam Gaiser and Martin Kavka for lending me books from their personal libraries when pandemic regulations limited my access to sources. I likewise am grateful to Adam and to Matthew Goff for their suggestions for wording translations, and to all of the above plus John Kelsay and David Levenson for their thoughtful queries and conversation. The staff of the Strozier Library at Florida State University was most helpful.

I am grateful to colleagues who responded to recent presentations and lectures I gave on monotheism and emotion by offering critical insights that helped me structure this *Element*: Paul Heck, Georges Tamer, Muetaz A. Al-Khatib, Allan Mittleman, and Marianne Heimbach-Steins at a meeting at the University of Erlangen; Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf, Hanna Pulpanek, and Henning Podulski at a meeting at the University of Munster; Keagan Brewer at a lecture at Macquarie University in Sydney; Kirk Essary, Michael Champion, Claire Walker, and Matthew Champion at a lecture at the University of Melbourne; and David Smith at a seminar at the University of Sydney.

I am especially grateful to the two anonymous readers for the Press who critically engaged with the manuscript and offered excellent suggestions for clarifications.

## Religion and Monotheism

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