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# Full Belly versus Starving Body

## Ritual Reversal and the Human Body in Biblical and Early Jewish Texts

Claudia Bergmann

### Abstract

Aspects of imagined ritual reversal in regard to ancient ideas about eating are the topic of this paper. It will particularly focus on the opposition of satisfied and starving human bodies, both in early Jewish texts that deal with this world and in texts that discuss circumstances in the World to Come. The aim is to investigate both the ritual theories that might be applied to these texts and the human characteristics that, according to the texts discussed, would lead human bodies either to starvation or satisfaction.<sup>1</sup>

### Keywords

Ancient Judaism, ritual theory, World to Come, body

## 1 Introduction

On any given Saturday, many Swedes embark on a peculiar ritual. Both children and adults flock to the local stores and sweet shops to pick out chocolate, licorice, and all kinds of colorful candy. On that day, the lines of the supermarkets are long, the faces of the buyers excited. What is about to commence is the ritual of consuming what is affectionately known as *Lördagsgodis*, the Saturday sweets.

According to statistics, Swedes eat the most candy of any country in the world, 17 kg per person per year according to some sources. Their sugar intake amounts to 50 kg per year, 25% coming directly from sweets, which is three times the recommended amount set by the World Health Organization. The idea of *Lördagsgodis* first came about in the late 1950s when the mental patients at the hospital in Lund were encouraged to eat large amounts of sweets in order for scientists to investigate if there is

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1) This article was written in the context of the Research Centre “Dynamics of Jewish Ritual Practices in Pluralistic Contexts from Antiquity to the Present” at the University of Erfurt, its short version was presented at the International Society of Biblical Literature on August 8, 2017.

a real connection between sugar and dental health.<sup>2</sup> When this connection was proven, the Swedish Medical Board recommended to parents and other caregivers to limit children's eating of sweets to one day a week in order to promote dental hygiene and keep caries at bay. Apparently, the Swedes' sweet tooth could not be stemmed by the ritual of *Lördagsgodis*, yet, dental health improved when sugar intake was limited to one day a week.

While one might wonder or chuckle about this example of a semi-private ritual that concerns children and adults in one specific country only and certainly has nothing to do with starvation versus satisfaction or full bellies versus emaciated bodies, understanding the ritual of *Lördagsgodis* can be informed by ritual theory, especially the ritual theories that concern the reversal or inversion of circumstances as part of the ritual process in the past and present. From a ritual studies perspective, this tradition constitutes a reversal ritual, albeit on a small scale. While children (and possibly also adults) deprive themselves of chocolate and candy throughout six days out of the week, the situation reverses itself on Saturdays. All of a sudden, the prohibition to eat sweets is lifted. In fact, eating sweets now is encouraged and children as well as adults indulge in something that they are denied all week or deny themselves most of the time. Come Sunday, the circumstances that prevail only on Saturday are reversed again and the intake of sweets again drops to near zero.

Aspects of imagined ritual reversal<sup>3</sup> in regard to ancient ideas about eating are the topic of this paper. It will particularly focus on the opposition of satisfied and starving human bodies both in texts that deal with this world and in texts that discuss circumstances in the World to Come. The aim is to investigate both the ritual theories that might be applied to these texts and the human characteristics that, according to the texts discussed, would lead human bodies either to starvation or satisfaction.

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2) B.E. Gustafsson et al., "The Vipeholm Dental Caries Study; The Effect of Different Levels of Carbohydrate Intake on Caries Activity in 436 Individuals Observed for Five Years," *Acta Odontol Scandinavica* 11 (1954): 232–264. For a more popular description of the ritual, see, among others: Hana Glasser, "An Adorable Swedish Tradition Has Its Roots in Human Experimentation," *Atlas Obscura*, January 3, 2017, <http://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/an-adorable-swedish-tradition-has-its-roots-in-human-experimentation>.

3) Also see Barbara A. Babcock, *The Reversible World. Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 14: "Symbolic inversion may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behavior which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values, and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, or social and political although, perhaps because, inversion is so basic to symbolic processes, so crucial to expressive behavior, it is not, until recently, been analytically isolated except in its obvious and overt forms such as 'rituals of rebellion', role reversal, and institutionalize clowning." Symbolic reversal and symbolic inversion sometimes appear to be used interchangeably, compare Babcock, *The Reversible World*, 21.

## 2 The satisfied / starving human body in biblical and early Jewish texts

Nourishing oneself or being nourished is, of course, part of everyday life. It constitutes an activity that distinguishes the living body from the dead body, yet, its meaning is not self-evident, and it is not without deeper or symbolic meanings. Most cultures and their literary expressions throughout the centuries know of a 'Golden Age'; a past and future characterized by nutritional satisfaction, natural abundance, even long or eternal life for those who experience it.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, texts speak of the fear of hunger and experiences of starvation that are occasionally connected to the question how one might have deserved these dire situations. It appears that both the availability of food and communal events can be mirrors of fortune and divine grace; the lack thereof indicate misfortune and divine absence or judgment. Thus, biblical and extra-biblical texts see the human body as the playing field of divine care or neglect.<sup>5</sup>

In general, images of food and eating take up much space in the Hebrew Bible and in extra-biblical early Jewish texts.<sup>6</sup> As just one indicator of that, the Hebrew root *אכל* 'to eat' alone appears almost 1000 times in the Masoretic text. Many biblical and extra-biblical texts emphasize that it is God who provides nourishment for animals and human beings.<sup>7</sup> Many narratives that deal with God's acting on Israel, God's promise to Israel, or divine rescue of individuals and of the people as a whole place feeding stories at the center of their descriptions. In the desert, God provides quail, manna, and water

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4) Compare Peter-Ben Smit, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom. Eschatological Meals and Scenes of Utopian Abundance in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 16-18.

5) This article focuses on Hebrew Bible texts and extra-biblical texts ascribed to the Jewish tradition. It should be noted that many of the observations made here could certainly also be applied to texts from the New Testament.

6) Compare especially: Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone. The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

7) Compare, for example, *Genesis* 1:29-30; 2:16; *Psalms* 145:15.

or, to speak with other sources, “food from heaven”.<sup>8</sup> In the book of Deuteronomy, several feasts help the people remember God’s saving actions in the history of Israel.<sup>9</sup>

But biblical feasts also function as *rites de passage* (a concept developed by Arnold van Gennep and later expanded by Victor W. Turner) that help individuals as well as groups of people to pass from one part of life to another.<sup>10</sup> Thus, eating and drinking symbolize more than keeping one’s body alive. In both biblical and extra-biblical texts, both individual and commensal eating take on meanings beyond those of pure biology. Eating, and especially eating together, determines one’s place in the community, creates and defines community, is an expression of social status and social hierarchies, creates and maintains power and political circumstances, connects the individual and national past with the present, sometimes points to hopes of the future or to certain concepts of the divine, and often does so in a combination of purposes.<sup>11</sup>

8) Exodus 16; Psalms 105:40-41; Nehemia 9:15.

9) Examples are Deuteronomy 12:7 and 14:26. Also compare MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 80: “Most significantly the feasts are given a central role in Israel’s recollecting of the past.” Nathan MacDonald, Luzia Sutter Rehmman and Kathy Ehrensperger conclude: “In biblical texts, meals are often occasions of decisive actions, a pivotal point in the narrative, the centre of communities, climaxes or low points, places where fate is determined. Who ‘we are’, ‘to whom’ we belong, with whom we make ‘common cause’ is decided at the table. Here, identity not only manifests itself, but can also be transformed as the meal goes on. How we eat, with whom we eat, what becomes significant during the meal, can turn out to be decisive for those gathered at the table. In the end, eating or non-eating decides about life and death.” See Nathan MacDonald, Kathy Ehrensperger and Luzia Sutter Rehmman (eds.), *Decisive Meals. Dining Politics in Biblical Literature* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), x. Also see MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 70-99.

10) Compare, for example, the feast at the occasion of the weaning of Isaac (*Genesis* 21:8), the feasts surrounding contractual agreements between Laban and Jacob (*Genesis* 31:44-46) or God and Israel (*Exodus* 24:4-11; *1 Kings* 18:41), or feasts that are connected to sacrifices to the divine (for example *2 Samuel* 6-7).

11) Compare, for example, Jonathan S. Greer, *Dinner at Dan. Biblical and Archaeological Evidence for Sacred Feasts at Iron Age II Tel Dan and their Significance* (Boston: Brill, 2013), 4; Markus Öhler, “Essen, Ethnos, Identität – der antiochenische Zwischenfall (Gal 2,11-14),” in *Der eine Gott und das gemeinschaftliche Mahl. Inklusion und Exklusion biblischer Vorstellungen von Mahl und Gemeinschaft im Kontext antiker Festkultur*, eds. Wolfgang Weiß and Michael Becker (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 189. For general English introductions to the roles of food and feasting in society, see, for example: Carole Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden, *Feasts* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (London: Routledge, 1966); Mary Douglas, “Deciphering a Meal,” in *Implicit Meanings*, ed. Mary Douglas (London: Routledge, 1975), 249-275; Mary Douglas, *Food in the Social Order* (New York: Russell Sage, 1984); Jonathan Friedman, *Consumption and Identity* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1994); Jack Goody, *Cooking, Class and Cuisine: A Study in Comparative Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Origin of Table Manners* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1978); Inge Nielsen and Hanna Nielsen (eds.), *Meals in a Social Context: Aspects of the Communal Meal in the Hellenistic and Roman World* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1998); Polly Wiessner and Wulf Schieffenhovel (eds.), *Food and the Status Quest* (Providence: Berghahn Books, 1996).

Victor W. Turner's understanding of *rites des passages* and especially his definition of the so-called 'liminal period' prove most pertinent to this study as it describes the development of a certain 'communitas', an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated society or even community of equal individuals that, in our case, is defined by featuring full bellies or, alternatively, starving bodies:

The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae ... are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and persons allude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions and cultural spaces. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.<sup>12</sup>

Liminality implies that the high would not be high unless the low existed, and he who was high must experience what it is like to be low.<sup>13</sup>

Turner assumes that both the liminal phase and the *communitas* have an end, and that the original circumstances are re-created once the third phase, which he calls 'reaggregation' or 'reincorporation', takes place. In the biblical and extra-biblical texts discussed here, though, the liminal phase appears to be of unlimited duration when this world turns into the World to Come, and circumstances are reversed. This is also true for the bodies of the people involved. If the just and righteous starved in this world, they will be physically satisfied in the next. And if the unrighteous enjoyed full bellies in this world, they will be starving in the World to Come. As the circumstances of the World to Come appear to be final, the *communitas* of the righteous will enjoy physical satisfaction for eternity. In the two following sections, examples of biblical and extra-biblical texts are given where the physical circumstances of this world will be reversed in the World to Come.

## 2.1 In Hebrew Bible texts

In biblical texts, satisfied or starving bodies are not caused by circumstance but by divine action in response to human behavior. The just may be physically satisfied and feature full bellies because God blesses them with abundance; if they starve, the abundance is promised for a future day. Alternatively, the evil ones may be portrayed as physically satisfied, a circumstance that will certainly be reversed

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12) Victor W. Turner, *The Ritual Process. Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge, 1969), 95.

13) *Ibid.*, 97.

in the future by God’s will. God is said to pass judgment upon the evil and the righteous by means of providing or, alternatively, refusing food and drink.<sup>14</sup> Nathan Macdonald writes:

In the Old Testament the table is the locus for judgment and vindication. Possibly this idea developed from the royal table is the place where favor was shown to the servants of the king... Nevertheless, the table was also a place for competitive struggles and could also be a place at which shaming or dishonor took place... Perhaps most influential in later Jewish and Christian thinking is the portrayal of the end of time as a feasting location when the wicked are punished and the righteous vindicated.<sup>15</sup>

Often, biblical texts differentiate between the bodies of the enemies who might eat/drink in this world but will perish in the future, on the one hand, and the bodies of the members of Israel that will flourish in the future, on the other hand. One vivid example is *Isaiah* 55:1–2, a passage that details the provision of water and food, wine and milk free of charge, given to Israel by God, who honors God’s promise to David. Ten chapters later, in *Isaiah* 65:1–7, the book paints the opposite picture. Here, the people who provoke God’s anger and filled their bodies with the “flesh of swine” and the “broth of unclean things” will be punished. Both the future divine reward and the divine punishment will have clear physical effects. Thus, the punishment upon the enemies of God in *Isaiah* 65:7 also concerns a part of the enemy’s body, the lap or bosom (קִיחַ). An even more gruesome example where the human bodies comprising wicked Jerusalem are affected by this sort of divine punishment, comes from *Ezekiel* 5: parents are predicted to eat their offspring and vice versa (verse 10), and God sends pestilence, famine, and the sword to destroy the bodies of the wicked (verses 12 and 16–17).<sup>16</sup> But the book of *Ezekiel* also describes the opposite scenario. In *Ezekiel* 34:13–16, God provides agricultural abundance and plenty of water, peaceful pastures, and an attentive shepherd who will care for the injured and weak while, at the same time, he destroys those who were previously “fat and healthy”. Again, the focus is on the physical benefits of being faithful to God. Those who are righteous will have bodies that are fed and watered, that will be able to rest, and that will heal from the wounds previously inflicted on them.

While there are many more examples for divine punishment versus divine reward for human behavior executed upon human bodies, a preliminary summary can be drawn. It appears that imagined ritual reversal of fortunes that concern the bodies of Israel happens in two cases: when people return

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14) Examples for these motifs are: *Judges* 5:25; 1 *Samuel* 2:5–9. In this context, a few examples of the divine cup of wrath that judges the wicked (nations) should also be mentioned: *Isaiah* 51:17–22; *Jeremiah* 25:15–29, 48:26, 49:12, 51:7; *Ezekiel* 23:31–34; *Obadiah* 16; *Habakkuk* 2:15–17; *Zechariah* 12:2; *Psalms* 60:3 and 75:8; *Lamentations* 4:21. Its opposite might be the overflowing cup in *Psalms* 23. For the idea of destructive meals in biblical and extra-biblical texts, see Smit, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom*, 23–25, and MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 166–195.

15) MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 194–195.

16) Also compare *Ezekiel* 6:11–12, 7:15.19.



to God<sup>17</sup> or when people return from exile<sup>18</sup>, which, of course, is thought to also include a return to God. Both notions may carry a future note within them, as they appear in predictions, visions, or words of God that can be interpreted as concerning future events.<sup>19</sup> Exile and distance from God in general mean starvation and/or physical pain and discomfort.<sup>20</sup> Occasionally, it even means that the bodies of the enemies of God are fed to other humans or to the beasts. The (future) return from exile and closeness to God, however, causes full bellies and healthy bodies.<sup>21</sup>

## 2.2 In extra-biblical texts

Similar thoughts can be found in extra-biblical texts. From Qumran Cave 4 come fragments of a psalms scroll that contains both biblical and apocryphal texts that often refer to the World to Come. One of them speaks of future abundance and the reversal of the fortunes of the poor. Paleographic analysis dates this manuscript to the year 50 B.C.E.<sup>22</sup> Within a context of judgment by YHWH, when the evil ones are removed (4QPsf 9:5-6) and the just elevated, comes the following passage (4QPsf 9:8-14):

9:8 ... The heavens [will give] their dew,<sup>9</sup> and there will be no corru[pt dealing in] their [terri]tories. The earth<sup>10</sup> [will give] its fruit in its season, and<sup>11</sup> its [pro]duce will not fail. The fruit-trees<sup>12</sup> [...] of their grape-vines, and<sup>13</sup> their [spring]s will not deceive. <sup>14</sup> The poor will eat and those who [f]ear YHWH will be satisfied.<sup>23</sup>

Here, the topic is future abundance, a trope typical for early Jewish texts that describe utopian meals in the World to Come. Amongst descriptions of never-failing crops and rich water supplies, both from the heavens and from the earth, line 14 specifies the recipients of these blessings, namely the one who

17) Compare Daniel S. Steffen, “The Messianic Banquet as a Paradigm for Israel-Gentile Salvation in Matthew” (Unpublished Dissertation, 2001), 47-48.

18) Compare Steffen, “The Messianic Banquet,” 45-113. Examples are: *Isaiah* 1:19, 9:3, 27:2-6.12-13, 29:17-24, 30:19-29 etcetera. *Ezekiel* often compares the lack of food during the exile (for example *Ezekiel* 4:13-17, 5:10.12.16-17) with the abundance of food after the restoration from exile (for example *Ezekiel* 34:13-16.27.29, 36:8-15.29-30.34-35.37).

19) Also compare Steffen, “The Messianic Banquet,” 60-66. Smit, *Fellowship and Food in the Kingdom*, 26-27, sees here a connection to the “broader theme of the topic of restoration of creation as a consequence of the returned divine favor”, for example *Isaiah* 49:10, *Isaiah* 55:1-2, *Ezekiel* 36:21-38.

20) Examples are: *Ezekiel* 4:13-17; 12:16-20; 34:17-22; *Zephaniah* 1:13 etcetera.

21) Examples are: *Ezekiel* 34:11-16.27-29, 36:8-15.29-30; *Zephaniah* 2:6-7.13; *Zephaniah* 3:8-11, 8:11-12, 9:15-17.

22) For more introductory information, see Patrick W. Skehan, Eugene Ulrich and Peter W. Flint, “A Scroll Containing ‘Biblical’ and ‘Apocryphal’ Psalms: A Preliminary Edition of 4QPsf (4Q88),” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (1998): 267-282.

23) For Hebrew and English translation, see Florentino G. Martínez and Eibert J.C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls. Study Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), I:280-81. For a slightly different reading, see Skehan et al., “A Scroll Containing ‘Biblical’ and ‘Apocryphal’ Psalms,” 280-81.

used to be poor and the ones who fear God. Just as the poor and the God-fearing ones are identified, the verbs for ‘eating’ (ולכוי) and for full satisfaction (ועבשיו) are employed so that the reversal of circumstances becomes a very vivid one, as the righteous poor may eat until they are entirely satisfied.

That the reversal of circumstances in the World to Come has physical as well as nonphysical aspects is laid out in another passage from Qumran, which also contains apocalyptic thought (4Q521 Fragment 2 ii)<sup>24</sup>:

<sup>10</sup> The fru[it of a] good [wor]k will not be delayed for anyone <sup>11</sup> and the glorious things that have not taken place the Lord will do as he s[aid] <sup>12</sup> for he will heal the wounded, give life to the dead and preach good news to the poor <sup>13</sup> and he will [sat]isfy the [weak] ones and lead those who have been cast out and enrich (רשע) the hungry...<sup>25</sup>

Just prior to this passage, a description of heaven and earth obeying the Messiah and the benefits of being faithful puts this short text about the reversal of circumstances into a context. The text is very specific in detailing the preconditions for experiencing this reversal: it is the doers of good works (line 10) who, again, might be identified with the wounded, the dead, and the poor (line 12), as well as the weak ones, the ones cast out, and the hungry (line 13). In the previous lines, several groups of people who will reap similar benefits are mentioned already: the pious and the righteous (line 5), the poor and the faithful (line 6), the captives, the blind, and the ones who are bowed down (line 8). The benefits of righteous behavior, the “fruits of good work”, will then be given promptly in the World to Come and concern both the mind and the physical needs and properties of those who reach this world: wounded bodies will be healed, dead bodies will be imbued with new life, weak bodies will be strengthened, and hungry bodies will be satisfied.<sup>26</sup>

24) Émile Puech, “Une Apocalypse messianique (4Q521),” *Revue de Qumran* 15 (1992): 475-519; John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star. The Messiahs of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Other Ancient Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 117-23; Roland Bergmeier, “Beobachtungen zu 4 Q 521 f 2, II, 1-13,” *Zeitschriften der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 145, no. 1 (1995): 38-48; Michael Becker, “4Q521 und die Gesalbten,” *Revue de Qumran* 18 (1997): 74-75.

25) Hebrew according to Martínez and Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls*, II:1044. The English translation mostly follows John J. Collins, “The Works of the Messiah,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 1, no. 1 (1994): 99. For an entirely different reconstruction and translation that does not mention the feeding of the hungry, see Robert Eisenman and Michael O. Wise, *Jesus und die Urchristen. Die Qumran-Rollen entschlüsselt* (München: C. Bertelsmann, 1993), 27-29. The passage is reminiscent of texts such as *Psalms* 146, *Isaiah* 61:1, and even *Matthew* 11:2-5 and *Luke* 7:22 from the New Testament. On the possible relationship between 4Q521 and these New Testament passages, see Collins, “The Works of the Messiah,” 106-107.

26) On the two texts from Qumran, also see: Claudia D. Bergmann, “Future Food and Future Feasting: Tracing the Idea of the Meal in the World to Come in Qumran Literature,” in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls: John Collins at Seventy*, eds. Joel Baden, Hindy Najman and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2016): 152-172.

2 *Baruch*, a pseudepigraphic work that probably originated a few decades after the destruction of the second temple, features many of the typical characteristics that early Jewish apocalyptic writing generally attributes to the meal in the World to Come: fantastic foods that are connected to the *Urzeit* will be served again (Leviathan, Behemoth, manna)<sup>27</sup> and the earth will overflow in abundance (2 *Baruch* 29:1–8)<sup>28</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> And he answered and said to me: That which will happen at that time bears upon the whole earth.

<sup>2</sup> For at that time I shall only protect those found in this land at that time. <sup>3</sup> And it will happen that ... the Anointed One will begin to be revealed. <sup>4</sup> And Behemoth will reveal itself from its place, and Leviathan will come from the sea, the two great monsters which I created on the fifth day of creation and which I shall have kept until that time. And they will be nourishment for all who are left. <sup>5</sup> The earth will also yield fruits ten thousand fold. And on one vine will be a thousand branches, and one branch will produce a thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce a thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine. <sup>6</sup> And those who are hungry will enjoy themselves and they will, moreover, see marvels every day. <sup>7</sup> For winds will go out in front of me every morning to bring the fragrance of aromatic fruits and clouds at the end of the day to distill the dew of health.

<sup>8</sup> And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time.<sup>29</sup>

Two types of beneficiaries are mentioned in this text who will enjoy the abundance of the World to Come: “all who are left” (line 4, also line 8) and “those who are hungry” (line 6), but a reversal of circumstances only explicitly happens to the latter. The hungry will “enjoy themselves” (line 6) and satisfy their senses, especially their senses of sight (line 6) and of smell (line 7). The sense of taste might

27) Leviathan and Behemoth as fantastic foods in the World to Come are mentioned in 2 *Baruch* 29; 4 *Ezra* 6:49–52; and 1 *Enoch* 60:7–9.24. Manna becomes again available as food in the World to Come in 2 *Baruch* 29:8; *Visio Beati Esdrae* 59, manuscripts L and H; and the *Apocalypse of Zosimus* 13:2. Fruits from the Tree of Life are said to become future fantastic food in 1 *Enoch* 24–25; *Testament of Levi* 18:10–14; *Testament of Jacob* 23–28; *Apocalypse of Elijah* 38:14–39:15; and 4 *Ezra* 8:52.

28) Another characteristic of the meal in the World to Come is a meaning-laden location. In 1 *Enoch* 24:1–2 and 25:3–5, the mountain of God is the location for the imagined feast in the World to Come. A universal garden where the righteous eat is mentioned in 2 *Baruch* 29:1–8; 1 *Enoch* 10:16–11:2 and 60:7–8.20–23. A limited garden, Eden or paradise, is the location for the feast in the *Testament of Levi* 18:10–11; *Slavic Enoch* 8:1–9:1 and 42:1–5; 4 *Ezra* 8:50–53 and 9:17b–22; the Syrian version of the *History of the Rechabites* 7 and 10–11; and the *Apocalypse of Abraham* 21:4–9.

29) A.F.J. Klijn, “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Volume II*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1983): 630–31.

implicitly be mentioned when taking into consideration the tradition that the manna of the World to Come will take on the tastes of each individual preference.<sup>30</sup>

There are a few other texts that, directly or indirectly, refer to a reversal of circumstances connected to the imagined meals in the World to Come:

1 *Enoch* 25 speaks of a nicely scented tree that is not available in this world but will be available after the judgment and for the just and humble, who will then receive it (as food). The tree's fruit will give life to the chosen and cause happiness and long life, while extinguishing sadness and suffering.

In 4 *Ezra* 8:52–54, the author describes paradise as being reopened in the future after it had been closed for all human beings in this world. This will result in the provision of plenty, in goodness, wisdom, and rest for the righteous, as well as in health and the banishment of death.

Similarly, in the *Testament of Levi* 18:10, the gates of paradise are opened and the threatening sword is removed so that the saints are able to eat of the tree of life, which constitutes a reversal of the circumstances that were established after Adam disobeyed God.

In the *Testament of Jacob* 7:24, the authors speak of the bread of life and a portion of the tree of life being given to those who cared for the poor in this world.

The *Apocalypse of Elijah* 38:14–39:15 refers to a reversal of circumstances for those who have the name of the anointed one written on their foreheads and as a seal upon their hands. These righteous ones will be able to enter the holy land; they will eat of the tree of life, wear white clothes, be watched by the angels and, according to *Apocalypse of Elijah* 39:13, will neither hunger nor thirst.

2 *Enoch* 9:1b speaks of the trials and spiritual difficulties experienced by the just in this world, who, nevertheless, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, supported the fallen, and helped orphans. These people, says 2 *Enoch*, will gain entrance into paradise, with its two springs flowing over with milk and honey, as well as with oil and wine.

Most, but not all, of these texts originated around or after the time of the destruction of the second temple.

What are the criteria that distinguish satisfied human beings from starving human beings? Similarly to biblical texts, whether one fears God or not is the most important determining factor for being

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30) While the Hebrew Bible never mentions what manna exactly tastes like when Israel receives it for the first time, later traditions emphasize the different varieties of taste that, occasionally, are specifically suited to the individual preferences of those who receive it. Compare: *Wisdom of Solomon* 16:20–21 (NRSV): “Instead of these things you gave your people food of angels, and without their toil you supplied them from heaven with bread ready to eat, providing every pleasure and suited to every taste. For your sustenance manifested your sweetness toward your children; and the bread, ministering to the desire of the one who took it, was changed to suit everyone's liking.”

put into the one or the other category. God-fearing or righteous people will have full bellies in this world or – at the latest – in the World to Come; the unrighteous and the “sons of wickedness”, as they are sometimes called, will starve or even have their bodies fed to the wild beasts.<sup>31</sup> In addition to this characteristic that extra-biblical texts have in common with biblical texts, the former add another important characteristic that has to do with ethics rather than with faith: the notion that doing good works in regard to one’s neighbor, while being a sign of one’s fear of God, will directly lead to physical rewards in the World to Come that mirror the deeds one has done in this world. This characteristic already appears in a text that clearly can be dated before the destruction of the second temple (4Q521 Fragment 2 ii) but becomes even more prominent in texts that originated well after 70 CE (*Testament of Jacob* 7, 2 *Enoch* 9). The reversal of circumstances in the World to Come can thus have two aspects: (1) if the body of a righteous person was starving in this world, one will have a satisfied body in the World to Come; and (2) if one does good works in this world, such as feeding the poor and caring in other ways for them, one will receive physical rewards in the World to Come in an equal measure.<sup>32</sup>

### 3 Aspects of imagined ritual reversal in the World to Come: purposes, effects and duration

The human body is the playing field for ideas of imagined ritual reversal in connection with future meals as they are imagined in biblical and extra-biblical texts. While those who were righteous and God-fearing might have been subject to starvation and injury in this world, biblical and extra-biblical texts emphasize that the situation will be reversed in the World to Come. Those who used to starve will have full bellies; those who used to have injured bodies will heal. Extra-biblical texts, especially ones that originated at a later time, after the destruction of the second temple, add one characteristic to those people who will have full bellies and healed bodies in the World to Come: they were not only faithful to God but also acted ethically and fed the hungry or clothed the naked. It appears that ethical aspects of one’s faith become more important as time continues.

The promise of future abundance, full bellies, and physical wholeness in the World to Come, which constitute a radical reversal of the circumstances experienced by the audience of these texts in this world, might have two functions: on the one hand, it promotes charity towards one’s neighbor and, on the other hand, it promises a reward for righteous behavior that might be mirrored in the behavior one displayed in this world. By promising this future reward, righteous and ethical behavior in this world again reaches the physical realm. The clearest examples include texts such as the *Testament of Jacob* 7:24 that promise a direct relation between human behavior and divine reward: those who feed the poor in this world will be physically satisfied in the World to Come. But even aside from these

31) Example: *Sibylline Oracles* 3:697.

32) On the topic of reversal and meal in the Gospel of Luke and elsewhere in the New Testament, see MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 223–224.

direct correlations that concern divine reward, all texts that use the idea of the imagined meal in the World to Come lift up the physical aspects of the afterlife, as the people joining the feast will not only have full bellies but enjoy their food with all of their senses.

Aside from these two functions, the imagined ritual reversal described in these texts might have an additional effect. As ritual theorists remarked, reversal rituals point to certain conflicts in religion and society but encircle the conflict in such a way that it cannot fully break out. Georges Balandier stated that “the supreme ruse of power is to allow itself to be contested ritually in order to consolidate itself more effectively.”<sup>33</sup> Reversal rituals thus legitimize and confirm the status quo. They create “cohesion in society”, as Max Gluckman pointed out, and “give expression, in reversed form, to the normal rightness of a particular kind of social order”,<sup>34</sup> both concerning the order of society and the place of individuals and groups in it. In that sense, Jewish texts about the feast in the World to Come legitimize the circumstances in this world as they give their readers an outlet and an outlook into better times, even if it may be in the form of an imagined ritual that reverses the conditions experienced in this world. In order to partake in the feast in the World to Come, one needs to expect possible starvation and the negative effects of righteous behavior in this world. In order to be counted among the righteous who will enjoy full bellies in the next world, one needs to work in this world; both physically, by supporting the poor and suffering, and spiritually, by staying and becoming righteous in the eyes of God. In that sense, the satisfied human body in the World to Come cannot exist without the starving body in this world.

The question is: Do people who experience reversal rituals or imagine a reversal of circumstances, more easily deal with the status quo, even if that means (physical) suffering? Apparently so, as many studies on the effects of reversal rituals have shown.<sup>35</sup> On a smaller scale, one can imagine a similar effect in regard to the ritual of *Lördagsgodis*. This Swedish custom reverses the common rule of ‘no candy’ but, in a way, also strengthens it by providing an outlet where the rule is broken. If *Lördagsgodis* did not happen on each week’s Saturday, the rule could probably not be enforced during the remaining six days, no matter how hard dentists and parents tried.<sup>36</sup>

33) Georges Balandier, *Political Anthropology* (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1972), 41.

34) Max Gluckman, “The License of Ritual,” in *Customs and Conflicts in Africa*, ed. Max Gluckman (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1955): 109-136.

35) See, for example, the references in Hendrik S. Versnel, “Die Saturnalien. Zu Frage von Ursprung, Funktion und Bedeutung,” in *Verkehrte Welten? Forschungen zum Motiv der rituellen Inversion*, ed. D. Fugger (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2013).

36) Also compare Babcock, *The Reversible World*, 32: “The *mundus inversus* does more than simply mark our desire to live according to our usual orders and norms; it re-invests life with the vigor and *Spielraum* attainable in no other way. The process of symbolic inversion, far from being a residual category of experience, is its very opposite. What is socially peripheral is often symbolically central, and if we ignore or minimize inversion and other forms of cultural negation we often fail to understand the dynamics of symbolic processes generally.”

One aspect of the imagined ritual reversal in the World to Come as it was developed by early Jewish writers goes beyond what Victor W. Turner, James G. Frazer, and others described from a ritual studies perspective. Hendrik S. Versnel summarizes:

Das rituell durchgespielte Chaos wird oft mythisch im ursprünglichen Chaos verankert, so zum Beispiel in Form eines Kampfes zwischen Schöpfergott und Chaosmonster oder von Sintflut und anschließender Neuerschaffung, wie wir es im babylonischen Neujahrsmythos und -ritual vorfinden. Dieses ursprüngliche Chaos manifestiert sich als temporäre Auflösung aller Grenzlinien, als Rückkehr in einen undefinierten Zustand ohne Grenzen und moralische Standards, die sich in der Schaffung von Monstern und Monstrositäten äußert; eine Periode völliger Freiheit, die sich entsprechend in völliger Gesetzlosigkeit und totalem Überfluss manifestiert. Dies verleiht dem Fest eine Atmosphäre absoluter Ambivalenz: Trauer, Unruhe, Hoffnungslosigkeit wegen der Katastrophe der gestörten Ordnung stehen neben Begeisterung, Freude und Hoffnung über die Befreiung von den Einschnitten fesselnde Ordnung und der angenehmen Erfahrung temporären Überflusses. Somit ist die verkehrte Welt der Krisengesellschaft ein Abbild des kosmischen Chaos mythischer Zeiten.<sup>37</sup>

The circumstances in the World to Come are, however, not temporary, or in Frazer's words, "periods of license",<sup>38</sup> in which circumstances are reversed just for a short period of time. In the World to Come, and especially in the commensal meals celebrated there, myth and ritual merge. The reversal of circumstances, which in this world can only last for hours or days, as can be seen in events such as Roman *saturnalia*<sup>39</sup> or any other type of reversal ritual, is imagined by early Jewish texts about the feast in the World to Come as happening outside of time and space. This feast might have a beginning, but it does not have a temporal end.<sup>40</sup> The human bodies enjoying this feast enjoy it without end, without the feeling of being too full and without the need for rest after a meal or even the natural urge to empty one's bowels as part of the digestive process.

In the World to Come, there is no return to the 'original chaos'. Instead, the authors of early Jewish texts about the meal in the World to Come imagined a point in the past in which God had already ordered the chaos and provided for the future. This idealized past is now transferred to the imagined future and the reversal of circumstances pictured there. Now, the future world need not be temporary any longer. God already had the World to Come in mind when God chose to rein in chaos in the beginning and once and for all.

37) Versnel, "Die Saturnalien," 92-93.

38) Compare James G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (London: n.p., 1922), chapters 56-58.

39) Compare Versnel, "Die Saturnalien," especially 77-80 and Hendrik S. Versnel, *Transition and Reversal in Myth and Ritual* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 136-227.

40) Turner identifies one comparable example of a permanent ritual reversal among the Bantu to South Africa.

One wonders if, from God’s perspective, *Urzeit* and *Endzeit* are seen as positive times of divine order and control while this world is understood to be the time when ordered circumstances are temporarily reversed (as in saturnalia or any other kind of reversal ritual) and chaos reigns until divine order is re-established. In that case, the idealized *Urzeit* as well as the imagined *Endzeit* would be, to speak in Turner’s terminology, the ‘fixed points’ in the political, religious and ‘social structure’, this world would constitute the ‘liminal period’, in which “the characteristics of the ritual subject ... are ambiguous” as people in this world pass “through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state.”<sup>41</sup> According to this viewpoint, human bodies enjoy divinely ordered circumstances in the idealized *Urzeit* and the imagined *Endzeit*, while it is this world that allows the bodies of evil people to be fed and the bodies of righteous people to starve. But only for time, as circumstances will be reversed soon and return to the ideal conditions of the (idealized) beginning, wisely set in place by God for the (imagined) end.

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41) Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94.