Tamás Biró:

Is Judaism boring?

On the lack of counterintuitive agents in Jewish rituals.

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Mind, Morality and Magic

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Edited by
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Chapter 8

IS JUDAISM BORING?
ON THE LACK OF COUNTERINTUITIVE
AGENTS IN JEWISH RITUALS

Tamás Biró

WHAT MAKES A SYSTEM OF RITUALS INTERESTING?

Religious rituals proliferate throughout the world. Why is it so? Anthropologists and scholars of religion have been offering answers to this question for more than a century. Thomas Lawson and Robert McCauley (1990), after having reviewed previous approaches, advanced their own solution, which would become the opening chapter in the new research paradigm called the *cognitive science of religion*. The aim of this chapter is twofold. First, I shall present the linguist's perspective on the Lawson–McCauley model of religious rituals. My argument is that such an analysis sheds new light on the model, replacing it into its unduly forgotten original context, but also paving a new way to developing the model further. Second, I shall apply the Lawson–McCauley model to several Jewish rituals. By demonstrating the limits of the original model and suggesting revisions, I hope to also make the first steps on this new way.

We begin by reviewing some ideas that played a central role in the Chomskyan generative syntax in the 1980s, the dominant paradigm in linguistics in those days. Although left somehow implicit by Lawson and McCauley, and not recognized by most contemporary cognitive scholars of religion, their model of religious rituals is crucially based on these concepts. The way I subsequently present the Lawson–McCauley model, however, slightly differs from its original version, and thereby I am laying down the first stones for a more radical revision of the original theory, to be worked out in the future. The conclusions drawn from the analysis of Jewish religious practices in the second half of the chapter also point towards the need for such a revision.

In fact, the cognitive science of religion, by belonging to the larger family of cognitive sciences, has adopted the methodology of the exact sciences: Scientific models start with an initial observation and a "background philosophy." The model makes predictions, which must be tested (for instance,

in controlled experiments), in order to falsify or corroborate the original model—at least in theory. In practice, the new data collected while testing the original model contribute neither to the falsification nor to the corroboration of the original version, but rather help the scientist to refine it. This gradual evolution of the theory also interacts, almost invisibly, with the "background philosophy," often causing a slight shift in the latter. This cycle of a theory development is driven by the devil in the details, which shows up when working on specific examples. "A model without an example is like a car without an engine: it might look gorgeous, but it won't take you anywhere"—I was told in 2002 at a summer school in computational linguistics. Unlike many scholars in the humanities, their colleagues in the exact sciences do not search for simple examples that perfectly fit and illustrate the theory; they rather attempt to apply the model to difficult cases that will then help refine the theory. This is the reason why we are tackling rabbinic Judaism with the Lawson–McCauley model.

This theory–prediction–testing–rejection/revision cycle was also used in a subsequent book of McCauley and Lawson (2002). They put religious rituals in a three-dimensional space, the first dimension being the frequency of the ritual, the second one being the level of emotional arousal associated with the performance of the ritual, and the third dimension being the semantic-conceptual form of the ritual, to be explained in the next sections. Referring to selected examples, they argue that the emotional arousal is better predicted by ritual form than by frequency. Thereby, they maintain, they refute the theory of Harvey Whitehouse (1995), another early scholar employing a cognitive approach to religion. Rituals are, typically, either exciting, infrequent, and belonging to the "special-agent ritual" category, or emotionally less imposing, frequent, and belonging to the "special-patient/special-instrument" type. (The two form types rely on the 1990 model, and I shall momentarily explain them.) McCauley and Lawson support their theory with arguments drawn from recent research on human memory: only these two types of rituals would be faithfully transmitted in the long term, and hence, able to live on within a culture. A religious system must contain both types of rituals, otherwise it will be unbalanced: too boring or too exciting. If a religion lacks "special-agent rituals," then the theory predicts the emergence of "imagistic splinter groups" that will introduce new practices.

Nonetheless, we shall soon see that Jewish practices do not fit any of the two form categories. Are they not rituals at all? Is Judaism indeed "boring," at least in a technical sense, and, consequently, can we explain certain phenomena in Jewish history as "splinter group emergence"? Or, rather, should we say that Judaism falsifies the McCauley–Lawson theory, and, thus, scholars in the cognitive science of religion should stop using it? Or is there room for a revision of the original model? Are we maybe not cautious enough in applying the model? Are we making methodological

mistakes? The answer will be that probably each of these possibilities are true to some extent.[1]

THEMATIC ROLES ON THE SYNTAX–SEMANTICS INTERFACE

Before (re)introducing the ritual model of Lawson and McCauley (1990), which serves as the starting point of the theory of McCauley and Lawson (2002), let us get familiarized with some concepts that dominated generative syntax in the decade before the publication of the earlier book. These concepts are essential for an in-depth understanding of the Lawson–McCauley model.

Although going back to age-old observations, the formal notion of *thematic roles* (or *theta-roles*) was first introduced to linguistics in the late 1960s, under slightly different names, by people such as Jeffrey Gruber (1965), Charles Fillmore (1968) and Ray Jackendoff (1972: ch. 2). It received a central role in Noam Chomsky's *government and binding* (GB) theory (Chomsky 1981: 34; 1982: 6). GB, together with *principles and parameters* (P&P), represent the middle-stage between the early *generative-transformational syntax* of the sixties and the contemporary *minimalist program* (Chomsky 1995; combined with *biolinguistics* since Hauser *et al.* 2002). GB employs the techniques developed earlier, but in a more systematic and less *ad hoc* way, driven by general principles, even though these principles are not yet rooted in an even more general meta-theory. The thematic roles are related to the general principle called *theta-criterion.* Alternative theories of syntax developed in the last four decades (generative or cognitive in a broad sense, but not Chomskyan) often refer to thematic roles, as well.

It has been long observed that the "logical" or "semantic" subject of a sentence does not necessarily coincide with the syntactic subject. For instance, compare the following three sentences:

(1)   a. *My wife waters the plants regularly.*
       b. *The plants are watered by my wife regularly.*
       c. *The plants are watered regularly.*

---

1. Biró (2013) complements this chapter analyzing Jewish practices and movements with the Lawson–McCauley model. Focusing on emotions from a cognitive perspective, that chapter argues that the "rituals-and-emotions system" of Judaism would be misrepresented if we left out religious practices that do contribute to the emotional load of Judaism, but are not considered rituals in the original Lawson–McCauley model. While that chapter is rather concerned with the "McCauley–Lawson theory" of ritual dynamic systems (McCauley & Lawson 2002), the current one mainly focuses on the "Lawson–McCauley model" of the mental representation of rituals (Lawson & McCauley 1990). For a discussion of the differences in the two books, see also Chapter 9 in this volume.

The "logical/semantic subject" is my wife in the first two sentences, and unknown (also probably her, certainly not me) in the third one. Yet, the syntactic subject position (in English, the noun phrase preceding the verb; in many other languages, the noun phrase receiving the nominative case) is filled by the "logical/semantic object" in sentences (1b) and (1c). Contemporary syntax refers to the logical or semantic subject as the *agent*, whereas to the logical or semantic object as the *patient*—to simplify the discussion by leaving out details that are important, but irrelevant for our current purposes, and to stick to the terminology of Lawson and McCauley. The agent is the active actor in an action, whereas the patient undergoes it. The agent and the patient are called *thematic roles*, or *theta-roles*, together with a high number of further roles, some of which we shall return to shortly.

One of the central questions in syntax is how the different thematic roles are expressed in a sentence. On a semantic, logical, or conceptual level (the exact terminology used for this level depends on theoretical assumptions), an action can have, among others, an agent and a patient. On a syntactic level, the verb corresponding to that action has a subject argument (or position). If it is a transitive verb, it also has an object argument. Some verbs, such as *to give*, may be bi-transitive, with a third argument (the indirect or dative object). Motion verbs may require a prepositional phrase expressing the direction (goal). How are thematic roles associated with syntactic arguments (positions)?

A universal principle suggested by Chomsky (1981: 36, 112; 1982: 6) is the *Theta-criterion:* "each argument bears one and only one theta-role, and each theta-role is assigned to one and only one argument." Thus, the sentence **John feeds* is ungrammatical (as indicated by the asterisk), because the *feeding* action has two theta-roles (an agent, the *feeder*, and a patient, the *"feedee"*), and the second one is not assigned to any arguments of the verb *to feed* in this sentence. Similarly, a literal meaning of the sentence *It rains cats and dogs* would be ungrammatical, because the *raining* action (or rather, event) famously has zero thematic roles, whereas the verb *to rain* in this sentence has both a subject and an object. In numerous languages of the world, the sentence *It rains* has indeed no subject at all, thereby satisfying the Theta-criterion. English grammar, however, introduces *it* as a so-called *dummy subject* (or *expletive*), because the need for a subject in a sentence is a stronger requirement in English than satisfying the Theta-criterion. (Entering technical details, we would say that the Theta-criterion applies to the "deep" structure, whereas expletives are introduced in the "surface" structure.) Moreover, *it rains cats and dogs* is a fixed idiom, a semantically indivisible unit, despite its apparent syntactic structure. Hence, the Theta-criterion, whose task is to connect semantics to syntax (to ensure the so-called "syntax–semantics interface"), is inapplicable here.

Thus far the foretaste from theoretical linguistics. Let us now observe the following sentences (Fillmore 1968: 22), which shall bring us closer to the model of rituals. The asterisk denotes an ungrammatical sentence, and parentheses delineate optional sentence elements.

(2)　a.　*John*　　　　　*broke*　　　　　　*the window (with the hammer).*
　　　b.　*The hammer*　*broke*　　　　　　*the window.*
　　　c.　*The window*　*was broken*　　　　*by John (with the hammer).*
　　　d.　*The window*　*was broken*　　　　*by the hammer.*
　　　e.　*The window*　*broke/was broken.*
　　　f.　　　　　　　　** Broke*　　　　　*the window (with the hammer).*

On a semantic level, the *breaking* action has two roles: the breaking person (the *agent*) and the thing being broken (the *patient*). We observe that a third role can also be introduced, the *instrument,* designating the object using which the agent breaks the patient. On a syntactic level, the verb *to break* has a subject, as well as, optionally, an object and a *with*-phrase. The passive verb *to be broken* may also get a *by*-phrase.

The question posed by the linguist is how the roles of the action on the semantic level are associated to the arguments of the verb on the syntactic level. As illustrated by sentences (2), the *with*-phrase can only be associated with the instrument, whereas the direct object with the patient. The subject must preferably bear the agent role. If the agent is unknown, irrelevant, or not expressed for any other reason, such as in sentences (2b), (2d), or (2e), another role must take the subject position. Sentence (2f) is ungrammatical because it lacks a subject, even though the patient and the instrument appear in their preferred syntactic positions. Therefore, the agent-less idea intended by (2f) is better expressed as (2b), (2d), or (2e). If, however, the agent does appear in the sentence, it must appear as the subject (2a), unless some external factor forces the speaker to use the marked (less preferred, less natural, more complex) passive construction (2c).

Why do we have to introduce the instrument role? Is there any reason to say the *hammer* is an instrument—and not an agent—in sentence (2b), which hence lacks an explicit agent? The fact that the *hammer* is ontologically an artifact ("instrument" in everyday speech), whereas *John* is a person, is totally unrelated to what thematic roles they fill in. We need linguistic proof to introduce the distinction between the agent role and the instrument role. Let us, therefore, turn to the following sentences:

(3)　a.　*John broke the window. Mary broke the window.*
　　　b.　*The hammer broke the window.*
　　　c.　*John and Mary broke the window.*
　　　d.　*# John and the hammer broke the window.*
　　　e.　*John broke the window with the hammer.*
　　　f.　*# The hammer broke the window with John.*

The # symbol preceding a sentence means that even though the sentence is not ungrammatical from a syntactic point of view, semantically it is certainly infelicitous. To demonstrate that two sentence components are equivalent, syntacticians often use the coordination test. Sentence (3c) is grammatical, because *John* and *Mary* are both agents and subjects in (3a). Yet, for instance in (4), even if all of the three options in (4a) are perfect, (4b) is infelicitous, which observation demonstrates that the three *with*-phrases are not equivalent:

(4)   a. *Mary ate soup with noodles / with a spoon / with a friend.*
      b. *# Mary ate soup with noodles and a spoon and a friend.*

Similarly, in contrast to (3c), sentence (3d) is infelicitous, because *John* and the *hammer* do not play the same role in sentences (3a) and (3b), respectively. Hence, the need to distinguish between the agent role and the instrument role. Sentence (4b) can be grammatical only in a fabulous world, in which spoons are eaten by cannibals, or noodles and spoons sit at the table and eat. In a parallel way, (3d) and (3f) presuppose a counter-intuitive world: imagine a cartoon in which hammers come to life and join humans, or even employ humans, to perform actions. This is exactly the point where the cognitive science of religion joins in very soon.

Summarizing our linguistic observations, we conclude that the syntactic arguments of a verb bear the semantic theta-roles of the action expressed by that verb. Thematic roles include the *agent*, the *patient*, and the *instrument,* the roles that also figure in the Lawson–McCauley model. Further research introduces roles such as the *recipient* and *beneficiary,* the *location, source*, *goal*, and *time*, etc. Additionally, it turns out necessary to differentiate between the roles of actions (the *agent* or *actor,* and *patient* or *undergoer*), as opposed to the similar roles of psychological states (the *experiencer,* and the *theme* or *stimulus*). The picture is further complicated by the fact that different authors use different terminologies and emphasize various distinctions. The textbooks of Palmer (1994) and Van Valin (2001: 22–33) may serve as useful introductions. For our current purpose, however, we can ignore the theoretical linguistic subtleties.

A COGNITIVE ACTION REPRESENTATION SCHEME

The study of the language opens a window onto a large number of further cognitive processes. In particular, we postulate—and this is what Lawson and McCauley (1990) most probably also presupposed—that the study of syntax, as summarized in the previous section, illuminates the mental representation of actions and states-of-affair in the world. To mention a few examples, the infelicitous sentences (3d) and (3f) let us see the distinction

between an agent and an instrument in our psychological action representation "module." As mentioned earlier, research also has revealed similarities and differences in the ways languages encode action roles *versus* psychological state roles (for cross-linguistic examples, see Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 201–2), pointing to eventual similarities and differences in the underlying mental representations. While recent advances in syntax have focused on the syntax–semantics interface, that is, on the window itself, future research should use this window to look deeper into the semantic-conceptual domain. For instance, ingenious psychological experiments have recently already demonstrated that verbs with different semantic structures are most probably encoded differently on the conceptual level, since they are expressed differently in improvised, linguistically not conventionalized communication (Schouwstra *et al.* 2011).

Hence, following the footsteps of Lawson and McCauley (1990), we suppose that the thematic roles introduced by the linguists for actions and events (or verbs) are "grammatical reflexes of the cognitive awareness" (quoting Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: 195), that is, of a deeper (non-linguistic) mental structure. This latter was called an *action representation system* by Lawson and McCauley. In turn, the thematic roles have the potential to become the basis of a domain-general cognitive model. The *schemes*—as we shall call the information format employed by this action representation system—might not only be used to describe the meaning of an utterance in the linguistic domain, but also as building blocks for action planning, multi-modal event perception, autobiographical memory or storytelling. The cognitive science of religion enters the picture when we realize that religious rituals are actions, and so they also must be represented in the congregant's mind using this action representation scheme. A ritual is viewed as an action with an agent, a patient, an instrument, and so forth, but made somehow special.

Let us proceed with the reformulation of the Lawson–McCauley model. We postulate an *intuitive ontology* entertained by the human mind, which contains the building blocks needed to encode a specific action, event, or state-of-affair. Elements of the ontology can be real (e.g., John Smith, my neighbor, and the *walking* action), culturally postulated (Achilles, electromagnetism, and the *reincarnation* event), fictive (Snow White, the *time-travelling* action), hypothetical (the *Higgs boson*) or counterfactual (the current king of France). The intuitive ontology is partitioned into at least two major domains: entities and actions/events. Further domains, presently ignored, may include, for instance, properties, numbers, measures, time intervals, and locations.

Within the *entity domain*, we distinguish between a number of realms: humans, natural forces (such as the wind), animals, plants, artifacts, and natural objects. Entities are linguistically realized as nouns or noun phrases. Following Pascal Boyer (1994a), we suppose that each of these realms

comes with ontological expectations derived from folk-theories (intuitive physics, intuitive biology, and intuitive psychology). An entity violating some of these expectations is said to be *counterintuitive*. Thus, our mind can entertain counterintuitive natural objects, counterintuitive artifacts, counterintuitive humans, and so on. Furthermore, a subset of the entities is categorized as *ontological agents*: those that are (supposed by the mind to be) capable of autonomous, goal-directed intentional motion or other actions. The categorization of certain entities as ontological agents by the brain is very robust (Heider & Simmel 1944), at least in the case of healthy subjects (Adolphs 1999), and emerges at a very early age (e.g., Surian *et al.* 2007). The notion of "ontological agent" must not be confused with the thematic role "agent."

Within the *action/event domain*, we do not find specific actions and events (such as "yesterday I ate soup"), but prototypes (such as *eating*). We now focus on actions. An action—linguistically realized as a verb—has a number of thematic roles, corresponding to the syntactic arguments of the verb. For instance, the *walking* action has an agent role, usually expressed as the subject of the verb *to walk*. The *eating* action has an agent role and a patient role. The *giving* action has an agent role, a patient role and a recipient role. When an action is instantiated, when we think or speak of a specific episode of the *walking* or *giving* event, then the abstract action's roles are filled in with specific entities.

Which type of entity can fulfill which action role? In their model, Lawson and McCauley (1990: 98) introduce an *object agency filter*: the axiom "that only what count as agents from an ontological standpoint can fulfill the role of an agent in an action." Namely, the agent role is usually attributed "will or volition toward the action expressed by the sentence" (Jackendoff 1972: 32), whereas the entities capable of "will or volition toward an action" are exactly the ontological agents. Hence the coincidence in the terminology. Ontological agents, which may therefore fulfill the agent role of an action, comprise humans, (certain) animals, robots believed to be intelligent, culturally postulated counterintuitive agents (gods, spirits and ancestors), and fictive counterintuitive agents (such as cartoon figures, fairy tale characters, and literary creations).

A slightly broader class of entities can be called *agentive categories*, to incorporate anything that can act "by itself," such as non-goal-directed natural forces (wind, heat, gravity …). At the same time, some linguists introduce *natural cause* as a thematic role for verbs whose "agent" can be a natural force. The agent role and the natural cause role will be referred to together as *agentive roles*. A generalized version of the *agency filter* axiom requires that only agentive categories may fulfill the agentive roles. Accordingly, both *John* and *the heat* can melt the wax without any anterior cause. *John*, a goal-directed ontological agent, does it out of volition, whereas the *heat* does it by natural law. However, if the oven does so, then there must

be an agent (who has turned on the oven) or a natural force (the heat of the oven) that has enabled this artifact to melt the wax.

Along these lines, we arrive at a second axiom of human cognition: entities belonging to an agentive category may enable entities belonging to other categories to act on behalf of them, as instruments or secondary agents. Without such an anterior *enabling action*, non-agentive categories cannot fill in the instrument role. Lawson and McCauley put it slightly differently, promoting the enabled instrument into the agent role:

> The object agency filter prevents a ritual system (or, more generally, an action representation system) from generating any structural description which might make it appear to be the case that objects which have not undergone ritual alterations investing them with agency are capable of serving as agents in a ritual.   (Lawson & McCauley 1990: 99–100)

The phenomenon called *hypersensitive agency detection* (Guthrie 1993, but the term was introduced by J. L. Barrett 2004) also can be reformulated as an axiom of the cognitive action representation scheme: agentive roles are preferably fulfilled by ontological agents, rather than by other agentive categories (or enabled instruments). If John put the wax on the hot oven, then one would naturally say that it was John who melted the wax, rather than the oven or the heat of the oven. It has been argued that identifying the goal-directed agent behind any observation has an evolutionary advantage over preferring natural forces (better to suppose a nearby predator, when the noise was in fact made by the wind, than vice versa). Similarly, identifying the agent that is the ultimate cause is more useful than contenting oneself with the recognition of the instrument that has been enabled by an uncategorized agent.

In this section, we have laid down the basics of an action representation scheme, following the footsteps of Lawson and McCauley (1990). As so often done in the cognitive sciences, Lawson and McCauley also introduced a formalism for their structural descriptions. Scientists formalize their model for several reasons. First, formal notations are easier to handle than plain text above a certain level of complexity. Could you imagine solving a high-school math equation without using algebraic symbols? Formulae also provide a more efficient way of communication between trained scientists within the same discipline. (True, some effort may be required to acquire the skills needed to understand and use any formalism, but usually it is worth the investment.) Most importantly, however, cognitive science grew out of the computer metaphor of the brain, and therefore, one of the aims is to "crack the software code of the mind." Such a formalized theory can be eventually implemented as a program, to be used either as a model of the human brain, or as an industrial product of artificial intelligence.

Lawson and McCauley (1990) employ trees to formulize thematic relations, but that is a misleading technique, since traditionally a *syntactic tree* represents the phrase structure of a sentence, and not its thematic structure. Therefore, we shall rather use *attribute-value matrices* (AVMs), a data structure introduced by syntactic theories that have developed since the seventies as alternatives to the Chomskyan theory, most notably by lexical-functional grammar (LFG; Bresnan 2001) and head-driven phrase structure grammar (HPSG; Pollard & Sag 1994):

(5) A general AVM template for an action/event, and for an entity:

$$
\begin{bmatrix} \text{ACTION} \\ \text{ATTR1} \quad \textit{value1} \\ \text{ATTR2} \quad \textit{value2} \\ \text{ATTR3} \quad \textit{value3} \end{bmatrix}
\qquad
\begin{Bmatrix} \text{ENTITY} \\ \text{ATTR1} \quad \textit{value1} \\ \text{ATTR2} \quad \textit{value2} \\ \text{ATTR3} \quad \textit{value3} \end{Bmatrix}
$$

The uppermost line contains the type of the "thing" that is being described. The type will be set with small caps. To help readability, if this type is in the action/event domain of the ontology, then we shall use square brackets, whereas curly brackets will encircle entities. The rest of an AVM is a list of attribute-value pairs. Attributes of actions are the roles, and the values are the items filling those roles. For instance, here is how one would represent the action "John feeds the child":

(6) *John feeds the child*

$$
\begin{bmatrix} \text{GIVING-ACTION} \\ \text{AGENT} \qquad \textit{John} \\ \text{RECIPIENT} \quad \textit{child} \\ \text{PATIENT} \qquad \textit{food} \end{bmatrix}
$$

Here, the entities *John, child*, and *food* are simply rendered as words, but they could have also been printed as AVMs displaying their inner structures in curly brackets. A more complex structure is needed when an instrument acts on behalf of an agent, because the instrument has been enabled by that agent. The following AVM encodes the breaking of a window by a hammer that has been thrown by John:

(7) *A hammer, thrown by John, breaks the window*

$$
\begin{bmatrix} \text{BREAKING-EVENT} \\ \text{PATIENT} \qquad \textit{window} \\ \text{INSTRUMENT} \quad \boxed{1} \begin{Bmatrix} \text{HAMMER} \\ \textit{ENABLING} \quad \begin{bmatrix} \text{THROWING-ACTION} \\ \textit{AGENT} \quad \textit{John} \\ \textit{PATIENT} \quad \boxed{1} \end{bmatrix} \end{Bmatrix} \end{bmatrix}
$$

The patient of the *breaking* event is the window, and the instrument is the hammer. The former needs no elaboration, but the latter is also characterized by an enabling action; that is why we include the inner structure with the curly brackets. The enabling action appears as the value of the attribute *ENABLING* of the *hammer* entity. It is a *throwing* action (the smaller square brackets), with John as agent, and the enabled entity as patient. One can also read (7) in the reversed direction: there is a *throwing* action (with an agent and a patient), which enables the hammer, which is the instrument of the *breaking* event. The instrument of the *breaking* event is the same entity (the hammer) as the patient of the *throwing* action, and this identity is represented in a HPSG-style by assigning them the same index [1] in a small box.

RELIGIOUS RITUALS REPRESENTED

Subsequently, let us turn to religious rituals. According to the definition of Lawson and McCauley, a religious ritual is simply an action with at least one role borrowed from a religious conceptual system. For instance, if the recipient of the *giving* action in (6) is not a child but the local deity, then we arrive at a food sacrifice (cf. Lawson & McCauley 1990: 125):

(8)   *John offers a food sacrifice to the local deity*

$$\begin{bmatrix} \text{GIVING–ACTION} \\ \text{AGENT} \quad\quad \textit{John} \\ \text{RECIPIENT} \quad \textit{local deity} \\ \text{PATIENT} \quad\quad \textit{food} \end{bmatrix}$$

If the culturally postulated superhuman (counterintuitive) agent (CPS agent, henceforth, following McCauley & Lawson 2002) is the agent of the action, then scholars in the cognitive science of religion speak of *special-agent rituals*; otherwise, of *special-patient/special-instrument rituals*. The situation can be more complicated, when the CPS agent appears not directly in one of the slots, such as in (8), but deeper, within an enabling ritual. This is what happens in the case of a wedding in most branches of Christianity:

(9)   *The priest, who has been ordained by a bishop, who was ordained by … by Peter, who was ordained by Jesus, declares John and Mary husband and wife*

DECLARATION-ACTION

AG ⓟ [PERSON
JOB   priest
ENABLING   [DECLARATION-ACTION
                AG ⓑ [PERSON
                        JOB   priest
                        RANG   bishop
                        ENABLING   [DECLARATION-ACTION
                                         AG ... [DECLARATION
                                                   AG   Jesus
                                                   PAT ⓟ Peter
                                                   RESULT ⓟ is bishop]
                                         PAT ⓑ
                                         RESULT ⓑ is bishop]
                      ]
                PAT ⓟ
                RESULT   ⓟ is a priest.]
              ]

UTTERANCE   "I declare you husband and wife."

PAT ⓗ { PERSON
        NAME   John
        GENDER   male }   & ⓦ { PERSON
                                 NAME   Mary
                                 GENDER   female }

RESULT   Husband ⓗ and wife ⓦ are a married couple.
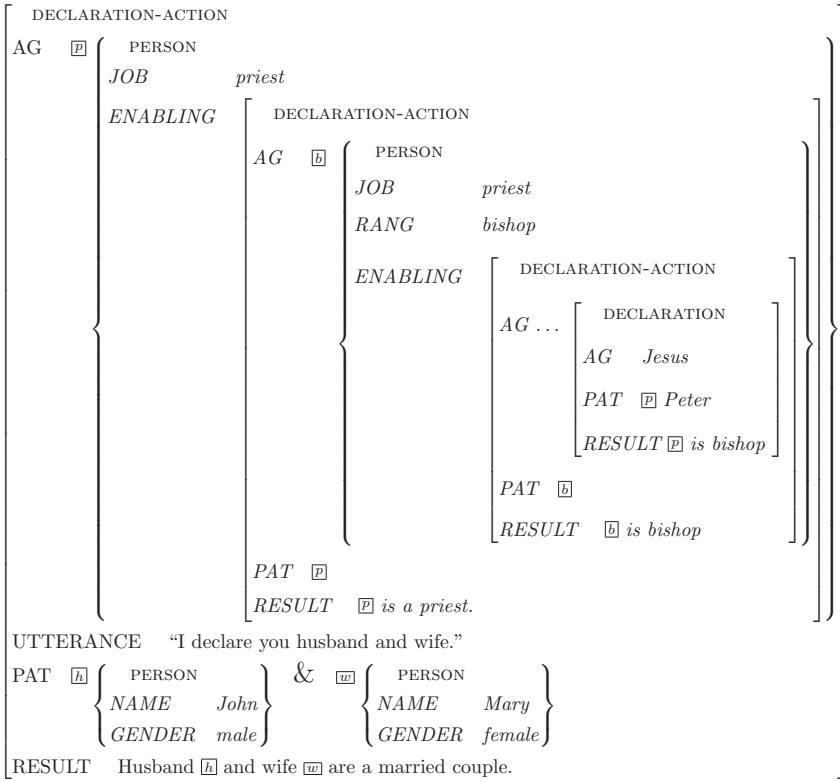
The *declaration* action has a patient-recipient (hearer, namely the young couple), an agent (speaker: the priest), as well as an utterance slot (the words pronounced by the priest, hence the quotation marks). Additionally, a *declaration* action is more than a *speaking* action, it is a speech act, and consequently, its AVM also includes a *result* attribute. The value of this attribute is a state-of-affair, which appears in AVM (9), for the sake of simplicity, as a sentence, but should be formulized as another attribute-value matrix. Observe how indices [h] and [w] are used to encode the fact that the same entities appear in the value of the patient attribute and the value of the result attribute.

Importantly, the priest must have undergone an enabling ritual (ordination), another *declaration* action, whose agent was a bishop. For the bishop to act as agent during ordination, he must also have undergone yet another enabling ritual, and so forth. At the end of the recursion, we find the (culturally postulated) initial enabling ritual: the CPS agent (Jesus) ordaining the first bishop, Peter. In other words, the priest acts (thanks to his ordination) on behalf of the bishop, and therefore (thanks to the

bishop's ordination) on behalf of … [and so forth] of Peter, and therefore (thanks to Peter's ordination) on behalf of Jesus. This is a complex situation, and consequently, attribute-value matrix (9) is much more complex than AVM (8).

The Christian wedding is categorized as a special-agent ritual, since the CPS agent appears somewhere within the agent slot of the main AVM of the wedding. Lawson and McCauley (1990) turn this observation into a theoretical framework by introducing two principles. The *principle of superhuman immediacy* (PSI) is worded as "the fewer enabling actions to which appeal must be made in order to implicate a superhuman agent, the more fundamental the ritual is to the religious system in question" (*ibid*.: 125). Indeed, as they note, Jesus' institution of the Church is more important to the Catholic system than the parishioner's blessing. It is unclear, though, how to measure the length of a poorly defined chain, such as the "…" in (9). One will certainly not want to say that a parishioner's blessing in the fifteenth century was more significant than a parishioner's blessing in the twenty-first century. Is the bishop's blessing more fundamental than the parishioner's just because of the number of enabling rituals? Nevertheless, PSI fits nicely the Jewish notion of *yeridat hadorot* ("the decline of the generations," or *nitkatnu hadorot*, "the generations diminished"), as summarized by Rabbi Zera in the name of Rabbi bar Zimuna (b. Shabb. 112b, Soncino translation, Freedman [1938] 1972): "if the earlier [scholars] were sons of angels, we are sons of men; and if the earlier [scholars] were sons of men, we are like asses …" Namely, the closer a generation to Moses, the more reliable their knowledge of the oral teaching transmitted by a chain of teachers since the revelation at Mount Sinai.

The second principle, the *principle of superhuman agency* (PSA), distinguishes between rituals in which the CPS agent has an active role, that is, it fills in the agent-position, as opposed to the rituals in which it fulfills a different, more passive role. In the 1990 book (Lawson & McCauley 1990: 125), the former are predicted to be more central in the religious system, whereas in the 2002 book, the former are predicted to involve higher sensory pageantry in addition to centrality. The underlying reason is that superhuman agents are able to bring about "super-permanent changes" in the world, whereas actions with human agents (and a CPS as only patient, instrument, or recipient) are less durable and may need frequent repetition (McCauley & Lawson 2002: 191).

If counterintuitive agents appear at more places of the structural description of a ritual, then the Principle of Superhuman Immediacy postulates that the role with the shortest enabling chain counts, when the Principle of Superhuman Agency is applied. For instance, in the case of Catholic baptism, the CPS agent appears in the description of both the agent (a priest having undergone ordination) and the instrument (the water having been blessed by the priest having undergone ordination). Yet, the chain

is certainly one step shorter in the case of the agent role, and therefore, baptism is a special-agent ritual. At the same time, a relic is usually more directly connected to the CPS agent, and therefore, a ceremony during which the priest (as the agent) carries around a relic (the patient of the *carrying* action) should be considered a special-patient ritual.

Finally, McCauley and Lawson (2002) demonstrate that a ritual system must contain a balance of the two types of rituals. Too many, or too often performed special-agent rituals, due to the high level of emotional arousal associated to them, would hit the *sensory overload ceiling*. Opposite to that, systems lacking special-agent rituals would suffer of the *tedium effect*, a remedy to which would be the emergence of imagistic, charismatic *splinter group movements* with more special-agent rituals.

In the rest of this chapter, I analyze a number of rituals in rabbinic Judaism, and conclude that the halakhic system does not contain any special-agent rituals. Is, therefore, Judaism boring?

ARE JEWISH RITUALS REALLY RITUALS?

Surprisingly, post-Temple (mainstream traditional) rabbinic Judaism does not seem to contain any rituals, at all. During the time of the Temple, and in theoretical halakhic literature, sacrifices were unquestionably rituals with a thematic structure very similar to (8) above. A full description would also include stipulations about the patient (the sacrificed entity) and other thematic roles: *location* (in the Jerusalem Temple only), and *time* (morning, afternoon, special holidays). Yet, these rituals have not been in existence for almost two millennia. In what follows, I demonstrate that the halakhic construct of no current Jewish religious practice satisfies the definition of a ritual.

After the destruction of the Temple, daily and festival prayers became the substitutes of the daily and festival sacrifices. Commenting on Deuteronomy 11:13, the rabbis explained: "What is the service [*avoda*] in the heart? It is prayer" (*Mekhilta of R. Simeon ben Yohai* 23:25; *b. Ta'an.* 2a). Indeed, prayer can be said to have a structure very similar to (8) again, but the *giving* action is replaced by a *speaking* action, that is, the patient is not food anymore, but the text of a prayer. However, McCauley and Lawson repeatedly argue that although prayers are "religious actions," they are not "religious rituals" in a technical sense, because they do not involve an "object of ritual action," they do not have an "instrumental dimension" (Lawson & McCauley 1990: 125; McCauley & Lawson 2002: 13, 15). Consequently, we have two choices: either we accept that prayers cannot replace sacrifices as special-recipient rituals, and therefore they do not contribute to the post-Temple ritual system; or we revise the Lawson–McCauley model.

Circumcision

Circumcision has been often presented as a prototypical example of special-agent rituals (e.g., McCauley & Lawson 2002: 15, 26, Whitehouse 2004a: 41, but Ketola 2007: 102, n. 5). Is circumcision really a special-agent ritual in Judaism? Both Jews and non-Jews would consider it to meet many characteristics of special-agent rituals. For instance, many people believe that circumcision is *the* rite of passage that makes a male baby Jewish (e.g., the informants of Malley & Barrett 2003: 6). And yet, this is not true according to the halakhah: a person is automatically Jewish if born to a Jewish mother—leaving aside conversion, as well as egalitarian theologies. The baby's father, the rabbinic court, and when he grows adult, the person himself are bound by the commandment of circumcision (*brit milla*)—and if he misses to do so, he is subject to extirpation (*karet*)—exactly because the uncircumcised person is also subject to the Jewish legal system (*Shulhan Arukh, Yore De'a* 261:1). Were he not Jewish, the commandment would not apply to him. Women and likely hemophiliacs (bleeders) are exempt from being circumcised, and yet, they are still Jews.

The study of Malley and Barrett (2003, quoted by Whitehouse 2004a) demonstrates a number of pitfalls that the scholar can fall in when categorizing a religious action as special-agent or special-patient ritual:

> Our informants … seemed to think that the mohel [a person
> trained to perform the circumcision in lieu of the father] was
> necessary. They were uncertain as to the procedure by which
> a person became a mohel, but seemed to regard mohels as a
> special class of person, uniquely eligible to carry out the bris
> [circumcision]. The tradition of the bris extends, in Jewish
> mythology, back to Abraham, who was the agent of the first cir-
> cumcisions (including his own). We therefore interpret the bris
> as a special agent ritual.   (Malley & Barrett 2003: 6)

A number of issues must be raised. First, Lawson and McCauley (1990: 77) emphasize that their model is a *theory of ritual competence*, a reference to the distinction between linguistic competence and linguistic performance introduced by Chomsky (1965: 3–4). In other words, the Lawson–McCauley model does not concern itself with the actual performance of the rituals, nor with *theologically correct* statements, but with the tacit knowledge about rituals in the mind of the participant or observer. Therefore, Malley and Barrett rightfully test the peculiar intuitions of each individual, which may diverge from the "halakhically correct" statement that a trained mohel is practical, but legally not necessary for the circumcision to be valid. Yet, does the train of thought prove that the subjects construct the bris as a special-agent ritual?

It is unclear from the report of Malley and Barrett in which sense they and their subjects regard mohels as "a special class of person" and "uniquely eligible." My guess is that at least some of the subjects must have understood it in a practical and not in a legal sense. Additionally, if a subject did not know the procedure that entitles a person to act as a mohel, then how can we derive that the person's mind included a full action representation scheme with an enabling ritual on the agent? Did subjects add that there *must* be such a procedure? Finally, if the subjects extended the tradition of the bris back to Abraham, who had performed his own circumcision, then where was the CPS agent in their scheme? Even if Abraham was seen as a mythological person, do we have any reason to suppose the subjects viewed him as a CPS agent?

For circumcision to be a special-agent ritual, the agent of the action—the person performing the circumcision—must either be a CPS agent (which rarely happens), or be acting on behalf of a CPS. For the latter option, the agent must have undergone an enabling ritual with a CPS agent in its structure. Some non-halakhic sources reflect this view, such as *Targum Ps.-Jonathan* to Genesis 17:13: "*The one who is circumcised should circumcise.*" In other words, circumcision has a recursive structure: the agent must have undergone an earlier circumcision as patient, whose agent had again undergone an even earlier one as patient, whose … The chain stops at Abraham's circumcision, while the passive form in Genesis 17:26 conceals the agent of Abraham's circumcision. Thus, we arrive at the attribute-value matrix (10), which, importantly, lacks a CPS agent, even if the innermost action implies a theophany. So we shall say that the action described by (10) is "almost" a special-agent ritual.

(10) Circumcision, as an almost special-agent ritual in popular perception and some non-halakhic sources
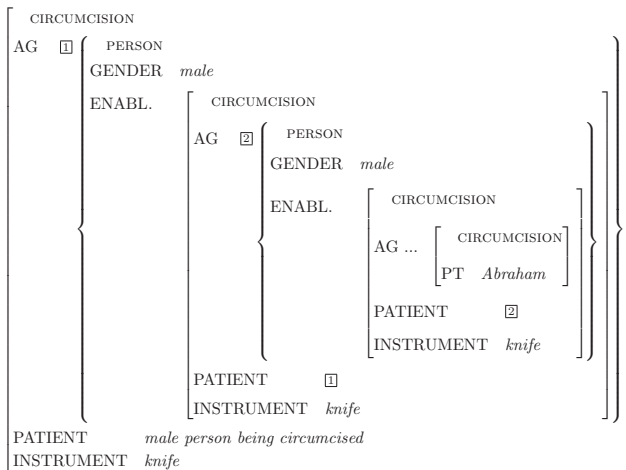
However, halakhic sources contradict this view. Quoting the highly influential twelfth century law code of Maimonides, relying on Talmudic sources such as *b. Avod. Zar.* 27a, and repeated in the *Shulhan Arukh* (*Yore Deʾa* 264: 1), the sixteenth-century code of Joseph Caro, determining orthodox Jewish life even today:

> Everybody is allowed to circumcise. Even the uncircumcised, the slave, the woman and the minor may circumcise, if there is no man present. But the gentile may not circumcise; yet, if he did so, one does not need to circumcise again.
>
> (Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Hilkhot Milla* 2,1;
> my translation)

As it is clear from this source, there are no restrictions on who the agent of the ritual must be. A free adult male is the preferred option, but even the circumcision performed by a gentile is valid (at least according to the opinion followed by Maimonides). It is probably not decent to have women touch the penis of a baby in public, though. Minors and slaves are not bound by the commandments, and therefore their performing these precepts is not fully valued. While Maimonides simply adds "uncircumcised" to the list, other sources (including Joseph Caro in the *Shulhan Arukh*) specify "an uncircumcised whose brothers have died during circumcision." Namely, if someone does not have a good reason for not being circumcised (such as being a potential bleeder), then his religious devoutness may be questioned. Misbelievers and gentiles raise problems, since they do not perform the commandments with the right intention—a rabbinical requirement specifying the "will or volition toward the action" appearing in the linguistic definition of agency. Nevertheless, the validity of the ritual is not affected *post facto*.

Consequently, we must conclude that circumcision is not a special-agent ritual in the classical (mainstream) halakhic sources; and thus, it is not in the mental representation of rabbis and educated Jews, either. Since there are hygienic and technical, but no ritual requirements regarding the knife, circumcision is not a special-instrument ritual, either. The knife, or any other object used during the circumcision, does not have to have undergone any enabling action. Circumcision is the very first ritual a newborn baby undergoes; hence, the patient of the ritual is certainly not the place where the CPS agent may appear in the structural description. Do we reckon that circumcision is not a religious ritual at all, at least in halakhah?

A possible solution is that the Lawson–McCauley model must be enriched, so that circumcision may be a ritual in a generalized sense: one of the thematic roles meets an *enabling criterion*—not necessarily an enabling ritual—that originates from the religious conceptual system. The enabling criterion is now not an action, that is, another ritual, rather a fact or event.

Remember that the intuitive ontology entertained by the human mind was assumed to combine (at least) two domains, entities, and event/actions. The second domain may contain not only actions, the realm that we have focused on thus far, but also further events and facts, which can also be represented as an AVM. Consequently, the following structure describes the halakhic notion of circumcision as a special-patient (*sic!*) ritual in the generalized sense:

(11) Circumcision, as a generalized special-patient ritual in standard hala-khic sources

$$
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{CIRCUMCISION} \\
\text{AGENT} \quad \textit{some person} \\
\text{PATIENT} \quad \boxed{1}
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{PERSON} \\
\text{GENDER} \quad \textit{male} \\
\text{ENABL.}
\begin{Bmatrix}
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{BIRTH} \\
\text{MOTHER} \quad \boxed{2}
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{PERSON} \\
\text{GENDER} \quad \textit{woman} \\
\text{ENABL.}
\begin{Bmatrix}
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{BIRTH} \\
\text{MOTHER} \quad \ldots \\
\text{CHILD} \quad \boxed{2}
\end{bmatrix}
\end{Bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix} \\
\text{CHILD} \quad \boxed{1}
\end{bmatrix}
\end{Bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix} \\
\text{INSTRUMENT} \quad \textit{knife}
\end{bmatrix}
$$

The way to read this attribute-value matrix is the following. A circumcision ritual is a *circumcision* action, such that the agent can be any person and the instrument can be any knife. Yet the patient (denoted with index [1]) must be a male who has the following enabling property: he was the child [1] in a *birth* event such that the mother (identified with index [2]) in this *birth* event has the following enabling property: she had been the child [2] in a *birth* event, such that … and so forth. The recursion goes as long as the mother either participated in a conversion ritual, or was present at Mount Sinai—also frequently conceived in the rabbinic literature as a conversion ritual. But does the conversion include a CPS?

Special agents? Conversion, rabbis, and kohanim

Let us now turn to the conversion ritual. What "makes" a convert a Jew? Although circumcision is part of the conversion process, the conversion of women and bleeders, which lack is this phase, shows that it is not as central as usually assumed. Conversion can be seen either as a special-agent

ritual, with the rabbinic court acting on behalf of the divine (as done by Malley & Barrett 2003), or as a special-instrument ritual, with the water of the ritual bath acting as a special instrument (discussed in the next subsection). Nonetheless, both approaches prove to be problematic.

The first option is to see the rabbinic court as a special agent, but then again, we miss the enabling ritual. A conversion by a "court" of three ignorant Jews is valid, at least in theory (*Shulhan Arukh, Yore De'a* 268:12). Moreover, the notion of a *rabbi* is tricky. In the late antiquity, the rabbis in Palestine were ordained (*semikhah*) by earlier rabbis, creating a chain of enabling rituals postulated to go back to Moses. Yet, this chain was discontinued by the fourth or fifth century CE, and the ordination of contemporary rabbis is a medieval development without any major halakhic importance (for a short summary, refer to Levitats *et al.* 2007).

It is nonetheless significant that the Jewish communities needed the reestablishment of a chain of rabbinic ordinations, and subsequently many uneducated Jews, especially in the non-orthodox world, view the rabbis as "special agents" (priests). According to the halakhah, a rabbi is not necessary for a wedding and a burial; anyone can perform these rituals, provided they know how to do it. Hence, these *rites of passage* are again not special-agent rituals in theory.[2] Yet popular opinion can hardly accept a wedding or burial without the presence of a rabbi, often the only person in the community sufficiently knowledgeable to perform the ritual. The same applies to the role of the rabbi at the *bar mitzvah* ceremony, a special-agent ritual according to McCauley and Lawson (2002: 132) and a special-instrument ritual for Malley and Barrett, but which in fact is only a festive occasion celebrating the boy's becoming legally adult, a tradition not older than the late middle ages (Kaplan & Joseph 2007; the Torah-reading performed at the *bar mitzvah* is a separate ritual to which we shall return). To summarize, we once more observe how intuitive religion—the mental representation of rituals and other religious concepts, as captured by the McCauley–Lawson theory—overwrites the theologically correct halakhic system.

Is this metamorphosis of the concept of a "rabbi" into a "priest" due to Christian influence? Maybe. I argue that it is rather due to the universal setup of the human mind, as illustrated by Christianity, and as modeled by Lawson and McCauley. Even if Christian influence could be demonstrated, still the medium through which Christian influence has an effect on Judaism is the setup of the human mind.

The only possibly special agents recognized by the halakhah are the *kohanim*, purportedly Aaron's descendants, and members of the priestly family. The *priestly blessing* pronounced by them as part of the synagogue

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2. Malley and Barrett (2003) correctly deduce that a Jewish wedding is not a special-agent ritual, but they fail to explain why they consider it a special-instrument ritual.

service might therefore be a special-agent ritual, as long as *speaking* actions are rituals (*pace* McCauley and Lawson). The redeeming of the first born (*pidyon ha-ben*), during which the kohen receives five silver shekels as the redemption price, is to be seen as a special-recipient ritual. Still, we are faced with the problem that, at least in rabbinic Judaism, the kohen participating in these actions has personally never undergone any enabling ritual that would turn him into a priest. He is entitled to act in these rituals only by virtue of an enabling fact, namely, a chain of *birth* events of unknown length, similar to the one appearing in AVM (11), but which is patrilineal. This chain terminates at Aaron and his sons, appointed by Moses following divine commands (Exod. 28–29 and Lev. 8–9). Again, these rituals can only be captured after a revision of the Lawson–McCauley model.

The ritual bath and other "special" instruments

Returning to conversion, the second option was to analyze it as a special-instrument ritual. Indeed, here is what a contemporary halakhic authority on conversion writes: "Immersion is not a cleansing process, but one whereby states are changed through a Divine purification process. Therefore, once a convert emerges from the waters of the mikvah, he 'is … a Jew in every way' (*Yevamot* 47b)" (Schwartz 1995: 55). Yet, in contradiction with the stipulations of the Lawson–McCauley model, we do not find any enabling ritual for the water of the ritual bath (*mikvah*), either in the case of conversion, or in the case of purification from (menstrual or other) impurity. The water of the ritual bath must meet physical criteria—such as pertaining to its quantity and source—which can again be formulated as enabling facts:

(12) Ritual immersion of women and converts according to halakhic sources (simplified)

$$
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{IMMERSION} \\
\text{AGENT} \qquad \text{\textit{woman or convert}} \\
\text{INSTRUMENT} \quad
\begin{Bmatrix}
\text{WATER} \\
\textit{QUANTITY} \quad \textit{40 seah} \\
\textit{SOURCE} \qquad \textit{natural}
\end{Bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix}
$$

In the case of the two structures proposed for circumcision, superhuman agency appeared somewhere at the end of the recursion: related to Abraham's circumcision in (10), and in the definition of Jewishness in (11). Yet, the AVM (12) absolutely lacks any reference to the CPS agent—unless we also include the motivation for the whole action to take place, or the source of the details of the action.

Indeed, a similar problem arises with many more rituals. Waving the *lulav* on the Feast of the Tabernacles or eating unleavened bread on Passover are *waving* and *eating* actions with instruments satisfying certain physical criteria, and the CPS agent only appears as the motivation and source behind the action. Even less constraints apply to three further rituals discussed by Malley and Barrett (burning the *hametz* as a preparation for Passover, as well as lighting the Shabbat candle and the *havdala*). In these cases, however, one might also argue for a special-time ritual. A certain moment in time becomes special by the enabling fact that the CPS agent pointed to it:

(13) The commandment of eating *matzah* on the first night of Passover (Nisan 15)

$$
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{EAT} \\
\text{AGENT} \quad \boxed{j}\ \textit{Jew} \\
\text{PATIENT} \quad \boxed{m}\ \textit{unleavened bread} \\
\text{TIME} \quad
\begin{Bmatrix}
\text{MOMENT IN TIME} \\
\text{DAY} \qquad \boxed{t}\ \textit{Nisan 15} \\
\text{ENABL.} \quad
\begin{bmatrix}
\text{TALKING-ACTION} \\
\text{AGENT} \qquad CPS \\
\text{UTTERANCE} \quad \text{``}\boxed{j}\ \textit{shall eat}\ \boxed{m}\ \textit{on}\ \boxed{t}\text{''}
\end{bmatrix}
\end{Bmatrix}
\end{bmatrix}
$$

Although many more religious practices in Judaism may be discussed, let us finish by mentioning three instruments used during synagogue services, the phylacteries, the Torah-scroll (already referred to in connection with the *bar mitzvah* ceremony) and the Esther-scroll (read on *Purim*), as well as the *mezuzah*, whose fixing on the doorpost is another special instrument ritual according to Malley and Barrett (2003). These four artifacts share the property that they must be written on parchment, following very strict rules; otherwise the rituals performed with them are invalid. Is the long process of writing them an enabling ritual? Through which channel are these scrolls enabled by the CPS agent?

The agent of the *writing* action (the scribe) does not need ordination, only technical skills and familiarity with the laws of writing these scrolls—similarly to the *mohel* performing a circumcision. Some opinions expect the scribe to immerse in a ritual bath before working, but we have just seen that the structure of ritual purification does not contain the CPS agent. Similarly, the ink and the pen used by the scribe, the instruments of the *writing* action, must satisfy physical criteria, but are not "enabled" in the way a Catholic priest would bless the baptismal water. To summarize, the only enabling criterion that can be identified is that the *writing* action is characterized by specific action properties, and similarly, the instruments also have certain properties.

The formalism needed to introduce such conditions is already present in the rewrite rules of Lawson and McCauley (1990: 100). What has to be added is a way to link these properties and action properties to the CPS agent. For instance, by working out the connection between the ritual system and other religious sub-domains (narratives, ethics, etc.), which in turn would supply statements such as "the CPS agent gave Moses the details of this commandment on Mount Sinai," or "failing to perform that commandment would entail punishment by the CPS agent." Only thus can we insert the CPS agent into the structural description of the Jewish rituals.

CONCLUSION

The discussion of Jewish practices can be continued endlessly, but the tendency is clear: we move gradually away from the original Lawson–McCauley model. By enlarging the formalism, we might quickly reach a point at which we do nothing more than *describe* the basic facts of Judaism. Such a model is not sufficiently restrictive to make *predictions*.

The original model was very limited, and therefore it made strong predictions on what a ritual system can look like. These predictions have turned out to be false in the case of classical rabbinic halakhah. What consequences should we draw, and what remedies have I suggested in this contribution?

A first direction is to conclude that the Lawson–McCauley model, in its original form, is unable to represent Jewish religious practice, whereas Judaism does not have rituals in a technical sense. If this is the case, then the model misses the target. Anybody can introduce any definition; but a definition of rituals is useful only if it covers a significant part of what we would call a ritual in everyday speech. Therefore, I have suggested to revise the original model, for instance, by introducing new thematic roles (beneficiary, time, place, etc.), as well as enabling facts beside the enabling rituals. Yet, the revised model also needs to be grounded in independent (linguistic, psychological, cross-cultural) observations, otherwise it is degraded to a difficult-to-read, and still uninteresting way of describing Judaism.

A second possibility is to accept that rabbinic Judaism really lacks special-agent rituals. Consequently, we predict the appearance of a "tedium effect," and subsequently the emergence of "splinter groups." And indeed, the history of the Jewish religion is replete with such events: further studies should discuss whether the Qumran-sect, Christianity, or medieval mysticism and messianic movements can be seen as "splinter group"-reactions to the "tedium" of classical Judaism.[3]

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3. On Qumran, see Ketola (2007), as well as Chapter 9 in the current volume.

Hasidism displays all the characteristics of the splinter groups predicted by the McCauley–Lawson theory: charismatic leaders, emotional arousal, and the introduction of novel special-agent rituals, such as the *tish* (the rebbe's table assembly for Shabbat meals). Remember that a sacrifice is a special-recipient *feeding* action. Now, the *tish* actually reverses this structure: it is the charismatic leader, the rebbe (closely connected to the CPS agent) who distributes bits of food from his plate to his followers, thereby introducing a special-agent *feeding* action. At the same time, the emotional arousal is further heightened by the singing of characteristic Hasidic tunes.

Another direction to look for reactions to the tedium effect may be the few traces that hint that some groups or individuals must have performed a Passover sacrifice even after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple.[4] Even if a sacrifice is a special-recipient ritual, its conceptual structure is still so clear, and the CPS agent appears in the structure so close to the human agent, that re-introducing sacrifices may be a solution to counter the "tedium." Mystical practices are yet another widespread technique to feel closer to the CPS agent.

The third answer to the failure of applying the Lawson–McCauley model to Judaism observes that popular understanding of Jewish rituals often differed from the "halakhically correct" concepts. Probably what happens is that the halakhic concepts are hard to represent mentally, and are cognitively less optimal. Our mind *can* represent them—otherwise they would not have emerged. External factors, such as literacy, help them survive. And yet, the unlearned mind replaces them with concepts that fit better the general cognitive architecture of the mind, as modeled by Lawson and McCauley. A closer look at folklore and non-halakhic rabbinic material may also display such a shift, since even the educated rabbis might think in a "halakhically incorrect way" in informal contexts or under cognitive load (similarly to the anthropomorphizing believers in Barrett & Keil 1996). If the representation of Jewish rituals in popular, folkloristic, and rabbinic but non-halakhic sources fits the Lawson–McCauley model better, then we have additional support for the proposed scheme as an adequate description of the *intuitive* mental representation of actions, as opposed to the *theologically correct* representation of rituals in the halakhic sources.

Should we reject the Lawson–McCauley model of rituals and the action representation system therein as falsified by rabbinic Judaism? No, we should certainly not. We rather ought to develop it further by looking at additional problematic case studies. Without doubt, the discussion of Judaism has demonstrated that ritual systems can never be boring to the scholar.

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4. For the period immediately following the destruction, refer to Guttmann (1967); for a "symbolic Pesach sacrifice" performed in 2004 on the Mount of Olives, see Temple Mount Faithful (2004).

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