

Hasdai Crescas & Leone Ebreo on Love and Joy

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ENG Abstract. Rabbi Hasdai Crescas' discussion of God's joy (*simḥah*) in his *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 3,

Chapter 5, had a marked influence on the discussion of God's joy (*la delectazione*) by Rabbi Judah Abrabanel, alias Leone Ebreo, in his *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III. Leone, following Crescas, holds that God's joy is active not passive; that it is mentioned in Psalms 104:³¹ and that it is also mentioned in BT *Ketubot* 8a. Moreover, Leone, like Crescas, cites Genesis 6:6, which attests to God's sadness. Leone's theories concerning God's joy and love reflect his reading of Crescas.

Keywords: Love, Joy, Sadness, Passions, Creation, Levi Gersonides, Joseph Albo.

ES Hasdai Crescas y Leone Ebreo sobre amor y deleite

Resumen. Las disquisiciones del rabino Hasdai Crescas sobre el "deleite de Dios" (*simḥah*) en su *Luz del Señor*, libro I, parte 3, capítulo 5, ejercieron una marcada influencia sobre las reflexiones en torno al "deleite de Dios" (*la delectazione*) del rabino Judá Abrabanel, alias Leone Ebreo, en sus *Diálogos de amor*, diálogo III. Leone, siguiendo a Crescas, sostiene que el "deleite de Dios" es activo, no pasivo, que se menciona en Salmos 104, 31 así como también en BT *Ketubot* 8a. Además, Leone, como Crescas, cita Génesis 6, 6, que da fe de la tristeza de Dios. Las teorías de Leone sobre el deleite y el amor de Dios reflejan su lectura de Crescas.

Palabras clave: Amor, deleite, tristeza, pasiones, creación, Levi Gersónides, Joseph Albo.

Summary: 1. The Joyous God. 2. The Sad God. 3. The Love of the Superior for the Inferior. 4. God as Creator and Lover. 5. Philo and Sophia. 6. Conclusion and Caveat. 7. Bibliography.

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1. The Joyous God

Rabbi Hasdai Crescas (c. 1340–1410/11) begins his discussion of God's joy (*simḥah*) in *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 3, Chapter 5, by noting that joy is a passion (*hippa'alut*). Passions are corporeal, and God, who is incorporeal, has no passions. Nonetheless, he continues, the Bible attributes joy to God, as in the verse "Let the Lord rejoice (*yismah*) in His works" (Psalms 104:31). Moreover, he adds, the Rabbis too attribute joy to God, as in the benediction prefaced to the Grace after the Wedding Meal: "Blessed be our God in whose habitation there is joy (*ha-simḥah*)" (BT *Ketubot* 8a). Crescas' text reads as follows:

Since every passion (*hippa'alut*) must be negated of God [...] for it is something corporeal, we should examine one notion we have found attributed to Him in prophecy and in the dicta of our Rabbis of blessed memory, namely, joy (*ha-simḥah*). In the Hagiographa, it says: "Let the Lord rejoice in His works (*yismah...*

be-ma'asav)" (Psalms 104:31). As for the dicta of our Rabbis, they instituted the formula of the benediction: "in whose habitation there is joy" (*she-ha-simḥah bi-m'ono*)" (BT *Ketubot* 8a). This attribution [of joy to God] is found in many Scriptural texts and Rabbinic exegeses [...].

If joy is a passion, how did the Bible and the Rabbis attribute it to God? Crescas explains: God's joy, as opposed to ours, is not a passion but *an action*. God is not passive (*mitpa'el*) but active (*po'el*). He does not suffer joy, but causes it. Crescas puts this as follows:

Now, since it has been demonstrated true beyond any doubt that God is the true Agent (*ha-po'el*) of all existing things intentionally

¹ H. Crescas, *Or Adonai*, ed. S. Fisher (Jerusalem: Sifrei Ramot, 1990), 118; id., *Light of the Lord*, trans. R. Weiss (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 116. In quotations Weiss' translation may sometimes be modified.

and voluntarily, and sustains their existence through the overflowing of His goodness perpetually [...] it follows that in His intentionally and voluntarily causing His goodness and perfection (*ha-shelemut*) to overflow, He necessarily loves the increasing of goodness [...]. Now, love (*ha-ahabah*) is nothing other than pleasure of the will (*'arebut ha-raṣon*), and this is the true joy, as it is said, "Let the Lord rejoice in His works" (Psalms 104:31). This states explicitly that the joy [of God] is in His works, that is, in His causing His goodness to overflow unto them by His sustaining their existence continuously in the most perfect (*shalem*) of ways [...] [O]ur Rabbis of blessed memory said in several places that the Holy One, blessed be He, "desires" [...]. They meant that [...] pleasure and joy for Him consist in His causing the good to overflow².

Crescas' comments here contain three distinct elements that are echoed in the *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III, by Rabbi Judah Abrabanel, alias Leone Ebreo (c. 1460-c. 1530): first, God's joy is active not passive; second, it is mentioned in Psalms 104:31; and third, it is mentioned in BT *Ketubot* 8a. Here is the passage in the *Dialogues of Love*:

SOPHIA: If the love (*l'amore*) and joy (*la delectazione*) in intellectual beings are not passions (*passioni*), what are they?

PHILO: They are intellectual activities (*atti intellectuali*) [...] free from natural passion.

SOPHIA: And what are [love and joy] in the divine intellect?

PHILO: Divine love is the inclination of God's most beautiful wisdom toward [...] the universe created by Him [...]. Therefore, David says, "Lord rejoice in His works (*Dilettasi...ne li effetti suoi*)" (Psalms 104:31). For in this union of created with Creator consists [...] the joy (*la delectazione*) of God, relative to the happiness (*la felicità*) of His work (*effetto*) [...]. The ancient Hebrews, when they were rejoicing (*quando avevano diletto*), used to say: "Blessed be He that joy dwells in Him (*che la delectazione abita in lui*)" (BT *Ketubot* 8a)³.

Leone follows Crescas in teaching that God's love, joy, and pleasure are actions and causes, not passions or effects. Like Crescas, he illustrates God's joy by citing Psalms 104:31 and BT *Ketubot* 8a. Note his distinctive translation of Psalms 104:31. Instead of translating *be-ma'asav* as *nelle opera sue* ("in His works"), he translates it: *ne li effetti suoi* ("in His

effects"). God's joy is that of the Cause in His effects. His translation of the nuptial benediction is also distinctive: "Blessed be He that joy dwells *in Him*"; i.e., the joy is not in God's habitation or dwelling place but in God Himself.

The similarities between Leone's discussion of God's joy here in *Dialogues of Love*, Part III, and Crescas' discussion of the subject in *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 2, Chapter 5, are very clear.

2. The Sad God

Both Crescas and Leone discuss not only Scripture's attribution of joy to God, but also its attribution of sadness to Him. Crescas mentions God's sadness in the same passage quoted above from *Light of the Lord*, Book I, Part 3, Chapter 5:

Inasmuch as the knowledge of contraries is one [cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, XI, 3, 1061a], if we attribute to [God] sadness (*iṣṣabon*), as it is said "And He was sad at His heart" (Genesis 6:6), "They made sad His holy spirit" (Isaiah 63:10), and "I will be with Him in trouble" (Psalms 91:15), according to the way the Rabbis [homiletically] interpreted this verse [in BT *Ta'anit* 16a, i.e., "I will be with Him in *His* trouble"], then we should also attribute to Him joy (*ha-simḥah*) [...].

[J]oy and sadness (*ha-ēseb*) are contraries, and fall under one genus, namely, the genus of passion (*ha-hippa'alut*) [...]. [J]oy is nothing but the pleasure of the will (*'arebut ha-raṣon*), while sadness is opposition in the will (*hitnaggedut ba-raṣon*), and they are passions of the soul⁴.

Leone writes in the parallel passage in *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III:

PHILO: [...] It is not strange that we should say that God *rejoices* in the perfection of His creatures, when we see in Sacred Scripture that because of the universal sinfulness of humans there came the flood, and "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth [...]. And He was sad at His heart" (Genesis 6:5-6) [...]. If, therefore, the wickedness of humans makes God sad (*attrista*) at His heart [...], how much more will their perfection and blessing give Him cause to rejoice! But in truth neither sadness (*la tristeza*) nor joy (*la letizia*) are passions in Him; for [His] joy (*la delectazione*) is the gracious agreement (*grata corrispondenza*) in the perfection (*la perfezione*) of His work (*suo effetto*), and [His] sadness is the privation of this [agreement] on account of [the imperfection of] the work (*l'effetto*)⁵.

Following Crescas, Leone argues that if Scripture attributes sadness to God, one should by the same token attribute joy to Him. Whereas Crescas does not present the argument explicitly as an *a fortiori* one, Leone does. In their references to Sacred Scripture, both Crescas and Leone cite Genesis 6:6, a verse

² Crescas, *Or Adonai*, 120; Crescas, *Light of the Lord*, 117-118. See my work: Harvey, Warren Zev, *Physics and Metaphysics in Hasdai Crescas* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1998).

³ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, ed. D. Giovannozzi (Rome: Laterza, 2008), 358-359; id., *Dialogues of Love*, trans. D. Bacich and R. Pescatori (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2009), 351; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 114. Bacich and Pescatori translate *la delectazione* as "pleasure", which is definitely justified. However, I translate it here as "joy" since Leone often uses it as a translation of *simḥah*, e.g., his translations here of Psalms 104:31 and BT *Ketubot* 8a. Miguel Ángel Granada suggested to me that Leone's significant use of the word 'delectazione' may reflect the use of the term in Alfonso de la Torre's *Visión deleitable* (c. 1440).

⁴ Crescas, *Or Adonai*, 118-119; id., *Light of the Lord*, 116-117; see my study: Harvey, *Physics and Metaphysics*, 119-120.

⁵ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, 358-359; id., *Dialogues of Love*, 351; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 114.

which describes God's reaction to the generation of the flood: "And He was sad at His heart."

A less obvious parallel between the texts of Crescas and Leone concerns the term "perfection". When explaining God's joy in the world, Crescas speaks of His causing His "goodness and perfection" to overflow unto His creatures and His sustaining their existence "in the most perfect of ways". Leone similarly speaks here of God's joy in "the perfection of His creatures". It may be inferred from the statements of both philosophers that God's sadness is caused by imperfect human behavior.

3. The Love of the Superior for the Inferior

One of Crescas' most distinctive theological doctrines is that the love of the Creator for His creatures is greater than that of His creatures for Him. Abraham's love for God is called only *ahabah*, that is, "love" (Isaiah 41:8), while God's love for the Patriarchs is called *hesheq*, that is, "passionate love" (Deuteronomy 10:15)⁶. That the love of the superior is greater than that of the inferior follows from Crescas' premises: "The perfect one (*ha-shalem*) [...] loves good and perfection (*ha-shelemut*), and desires it; and in proportion to the perfection [of the lover] will be the love (*ha-ahabah*) and the pleasure in the will (*ha-'arebut ba-ḥefes*)."⁷ This doctrine contradicts the common Platonic and Aristotelian view according to which the love of the inferior for the superior is greater than that of the superior for the inferior⁸.

In the continuation of his discussion of God's joy in *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III, Leone broaches the subject of whether God's love for His creatures is greater than His creatures' love for Him:

PHILO: [...] In the love of the superior for the inferior [...] the joy (*la delectazione*) of the superior [...] consists in uniting [...] the less beautiful [or inferior] with itself, giving it beauty or perfection [...]. Not only does the inferior effect (*effetto*) receive an enjoyable perfection (*perfezione delectabile*), but so does its cause, [...] because a beautiful and perfect effect increases the beauty and perfection of its cause and gives it reason to rejoice (*dilettante*) [...]. And since God rejoices (*si diletta*) in the perfection of His works (*effetti*) and is saddened (*s'attrista*) by their defects (*difetti*), so much the more is it fitting that the created being should rejoice (*dilettare sé*) in the good of its [...] effect (*effetto*) and be sad (*attristarse*) at its doing bad.

SOPHIA: [...] I see how the end of all love in the universe is the joy (*la delectazione*) of the lover in his union with the beloved, whether inferior or superior to him (*sia inferiore o vero superiore*) [...]. If the love of the universe for God is that which leads to its ultimate perfection in union with Him, why did you say [...] that

the love of the Creator for the universe is that which produces this effect (*effetto*) [...]?⁹

Sophia's response to Philo makes it clear that he has left open the question of whether the love of the superior is greater than that of the inferior. He has explained that both the superior and the inferior enjoy their love, but has not indicated whose love is the greater – or the most joyful. But note Sophia's intimation: *sia inferiore o vero superiore*. Is the love of the two lovers equal?

4. God as Creator and Lover

In a passage in *Light of the Lord*, Book II, Part 6, Chapter 1, Crescas explains that God's love, goodness, and perfection are manifest in His creation of the universe:

Since it is known that God, may He be blessed, is the source and fountain of all perfections, and by virtue of His perfection, which is His essence, He loves the good, as may be seen from His actions in bringing into existence the entire universe, sustaining it eternally, and continuously creating it anew (*hiddusho tamid*) [...] it must necessarily be that the love of the good is an essential property of perfection. It follows from this that the greater the perfection [of the lover], the greater will be the love and the pleasure in the desire¹⁰.

In an earlier passage in *Dialogues of Love*, Dialogue III, Leone repeats this view:

SOPHIA: What, therefore, is the meaning of the word 'love' (*amore*) for God?

PHILO: It means the will to benefit (*bonificar*) His creatures and the whole universe, and to increase their perfection [...] God rejoices (*se n'allegra*) to see His creatures increase in perfection through their love of Him [...]. The Psalm says: "The Lord rejoices with the things He has made (*Iddio s'allegra con le cose che fece*)" (Psalms 104:31) [...].

SOPHIA: How can the world be both temporal and eternal at the same time?

PHILO: It is temporal in having had a beginning in time, and eternal because, as many of our theologians hold, it is not to have an end. Supreme power is reflected in its temporal origin [...] [and] infinite kindness (*beneficio*) in its eternal conservation (*l'eterna conservazione*)¹¹.

God's love for the universe is manifest in His eternal creation of it. Leone's opinion on this is identical with Crescas'. In addition, both Crescas and Leone speak of an eternal creation in some sense.

It will be noticed that in this text Leone translates Psalms 104:31 in a very different way from that in the previously quoted passage concerning God's joy. The Hebrew original is: *yismah adonai be-ma'asav* ("Let the Lord rejoice in His works"). In the previously quoted passage, the verse was translated: *Dilettasi il*

⁶ Crescas, *Or Adonai* (I, 3, 5), 121; (II, 6, 1), 242-243; id., *Light of the Lord*, 118, 218-219; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 111-113, 123-125.

⁷ Crescas, *Or Adonai* (II, 6, 1), 239; id., *Light of the Lord*, 215; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 110, 124.

⁸ See Plato, *Symposium* (200a and seq., 203b; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 7, 1158b; but cf. IX, 7, 1067b-1068a; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 108-113.

⁹ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, 359; id., *Dialogues of Love*, 352; see my *Physics and Metaphysics*, 115-116.

¹⁰ Crescas, *Or Adonai*, 242; id., *Light of the Lord*, p. 218.

¹¹ Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, 222, 227; id., *Dialogues of Love*, 226-231.

Signore ne li effetti suoi ("The Lord delights in His effects"). In this passage, it is translated: *Iddio s'allegro con le cose che fece* ("God rejoices with the things he made").

Everything is different! Is "God rejoices" *dilettasi* or *s'allegro*? Are His "works" His *effetti* or *le cose che fece*? Does God rejoice *in* His works or *with* them?

Is God *il Signore* (= Adonai) or *Iddio* (God)?

I don't know how to explain these blatant differences, but they definitely tell us something or other about the composition of the *Dialogues*. Were different texts written at different times and perhaps in different cities? Did Leone use different editors or – perhaps – different translators? Did he change his mind about the meaning of Psalms 104:31? These questions need to be explored.

5. Philo and Sophia

Philo and Sophia are engaged in a romantic philosophical courtship in which Philo plays the role of the teacher (= the superior), much like that of the teacher in Solomon ibn Gabirol's *Fons Vitae* or like that of the teacher in the same author's Hebrew poem, *Ahabtikha* ("I have loved thee"). The relationship of Philo to Sophia, like that of the teacher to the student in Ibn Gabirol's two works, represents the relationship of God to the universe. As the universe finds its perfection in its joyful union with its Creator, so Sophia may find her perfection in her joyful union with Philo. However, just as it is God's love of the universe that awakens the universe's love of God, so it is Philo's love of Sophia that must awaken her love for him.

Whose love is greater, God's love for the universe or the universe's love for God? Philo's love for Sophia or her love for him? Or perhaps in true love there is always equality between the two lovers, *sia inferiore o vero superiore* (as Sophia wisely intimated). There is no answer to this question in Leone's three *dialoghi d'amore*. Leone promised a fourth dialogue, which was either lost or never written. Perhaps it held the answer to our question¹².

Did Leone agree with Crescas – and Philo's love for Sophia was, according to him, greater than Sophia's love for Philo? Or did he agree with Plato and Aristotle, and Sophia's love for Philo was, according to him, greater than Philo's love for her? Or did he perchance agree with Sophia, and believe that in true love the passion of both lovers is always equal?

6. Conclusion and Caveat

Crescas' direct literary influence on Leone is manifest. Doubtless, a more extensive examination of Leone's debt to Crescas is a desideratum. However, a caveat is in order.

Crescas' discussions of God's joy and love were influenced by Gersonides' discussions on the subject in his *Wars of the Lord*, Book I, Chapter 13¹³, and

Book V, Part 3, Chapter 12;¹⁴ in his *Commentary on I Chronicles* 16:27;¹⁵ and in his lessons at the end of his *Commentary on I Chronicles*¹⁶. Moreover, both Gersonides and Crescas influenced Joseph Albo's discussion of God's joy and love in his *Book of Principles*, Book II, Chapter 15¹⁷. Leone without doubt read all three of these authors. It is not always easy to recognize when he is indebted to Crescas, and when he is indebted to Gersonides or Albo.

In this regard, it may be observed that the reference to Psalms 104:31 does not appear in Gersonides' discussions but does appear in Albo's; the reference to BT *Ketubot* 8a appears in Gersonides' discussions (both in the *Wars* in in the *Commentary on I Chronicles*) and in Albo's; the reference to Genesis 6:6 does not appear in Gersonides' discussions but does appear in Albo's; the critical distinction between love and joy as "passions" and as "actions" does not appear either in Gersonides' discussions or in Albo's. It does, however, appear in Spinoza's *Ethics*, Part III, Propositions 57-59, and Part V, Propositions 33-35¹⁸. Spinoza read both Crescas and Leone.

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¹² In several studies, D. Harari raised provocative questions about "the lost fourth dialogue". See, e.g., his "Some Lost Writings of Judah Abrabanel Abravanel (1465?-1535?) Found in the Works of Giordano Bruno (1548-1600)", *Shofar* 10 (1992): 62-89.

¹³ Gersonides, *Milhamot Adonai, Books I-IV*, ed. O. Elior (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 2018), 206-207; id., *Wars of the Lord*, trans. S. Feldman. 3 vols (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1984-1999), vol. I, 223-225.

¹⁴ Gersonides, *Milhamot Adonai, Book V, Parts 2-3, and Book VI*, ed. O. Elior (Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion University Press, 2021), 144-145; id., *Wars of the Lord*, vol. III, 173-174.

¹⁵ Gersonides, *Be'ur on Chronicles*, ed. M. Mortera (Cracow: Fischer, 1888), 51.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷ Josef Albo, *Sefer ha-ikkarim: Book of Principles*, ed. and trans. I. Husik. 4 vols (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), vol. II, 90-92.

¹⁸ Baruch Spinoza, *Opera*, ed. G. Gebhardt. 4 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1925), vol. II, 186-189, 300-302.