Part I: Rejoicing With Water

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah 51a and 51b

Mishnah. He who has not seen the rejoicing at the place of the water-drawing has never seen rejoicing in his life. At the conclusion of the first festival day of Tabernacles they descended to the court of the women where they had made a great enactment. There were there golden candlesticks with four golden bowls on the top of each of them and four ladders to each, and four youths drawn from the priestly stock in whose hands were held jars of oil containing one hundred and twenty log which they poured into the bowls. From the worn-out drawers and girdles of the priests they made wicks and with them they kindled the lamps; and there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not illuminated by the light of the place of the water-drawing. Men of piety and good deeds used to dance before them with lighted torches in their hands, and sing songs and praises. And Levites without number with harps, lutes, cymbals and trumpets and other musical instruments were there upon the fifteen steps leading down from the court of the Israelites to the court of the women, corresponding to the fifteen songs of ascents in the psalms...

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sukkah, p. 53a

It was taught: They said of Rabban Simeon ben Gamaliel that when he rejoiced at the Rejoicing at the place of the Water-Drawing, he used to take eight lighted torches [and throw them in the air] and catch one and throw one and they did not touch one another; and when he prostrated himself, he used to dig his two thumbs in the ground, bend down, kiss the ground, and draw himself up again, a feat which no other man could do, and this is what is meant by Kidah [bowing to the ground].

All translations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Judaic Classics Library. Thanks to Jonathan Neril for preparing these sources.
Our Rabbis taught, He who has not witnessed the rejoicing at the place of the Water-Drawing has never seen rejoicing in his life. He who has not seen Jerusalem in her splendour, has never seen a desirable city in his life. He who has not seen the Temple in its full construction has never seen a glorious building in his life... It has been taught, R. Judah stated, He who has not seen the double colonnade of Alexandria in Egypt has never seen the glory of Israel.

Discussion Questions

1. The “rejoicing at the place of the water drawing” (Simchat Beit Hashoeva) is portrayed as the height of happiness and celebration. Sukkot is known as the holiday for “Simcha” (joy). What do you think was the source of the happiness in this celebration?

2. What is the connection between this happiness and the drawing of water?

3. The Mishna teaches that Sukkot is also the time when we are judged for water. What do you think is the relationship between happiness and judgment?

Part II: Praying for Rain

3. FOR THE LORD GOD HAD NOT CAUSED IT TO RAIN UPON THE EARTH. The full Name [of G-d] is employed in connection with a full world; it is similarly employed in connection with the fall of rain. R. Simeon b. Yohai said: Three things are equal in importance, viz., earth, man, and rain. R. Levi b. Hiyatha said: And these three each consist of three letters, to teach that without earth there would be no rain and without rain earth could not endure; while without either man could not exist.

4. R. Hoshaya said: Wonderful is the might of rain, for it is reckoned as equivalent to the whole of creation. What is the proof? - Who does great things and unsearchable (Job V, 9); wherewith? By Giving rain upon the earth and sending waters upon the fields (ib. 10) R. Aha proved it from the following: He that has made the

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Discussion Questions:

We begin praying for rain on Shemini Atzeret, at the end of Sukkot. The sages consider rain very precious.

1. When you think about the rabbis’ perspective on rain, can you see how they saw it as: a) of equal importance with earth and people, b) very powerful, c) one of the three keys kept in the hands of G-d, d) as great as redemption?

2. What is your reaction to the sound of rain, including the sound of thunder? What memories, emotions, or physical sensations does the sound of rain evoke in you?

3. What is your attitude toward rain? Do you like it, or does it bother you? Why do you think that is?

4. Is your usual attitude toward rain the same, or different from that of the sages? What difference might it make if you adopted their perspective?

Part III: Water and Our Behavior

earth by His power, etc. (Jer. x, 12). At the sound of His giving a multitude of waters in the heavens (ib. 13) Now ‘sound’ signifies nothing but rain, as you read: Deep calls unto deep at the sound of Your cataracts [i.e., waterfalls] (Ps. XLII, 8).

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta’anit, p. 2a
Rabbi Yochanan said, the keys to three things were kept in the hand of the Holy One, Blessed be He, and not given over to an intermediary [nature]. They are, the key to rain, the key to childbirth and the key to the revival of the dead. The Key of Rain, for It is written, The L-rd will open unto thee His good treasure, the heaven to give the rain of thy land in its season (Deuteronomy 28:12)...

Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Ta’anit, p. 8b
R. Johanan said: The day on which rain falls is as great as the day of the Gathering of exiled [Israel,] as it is said (Psalms 126:4), “Turn our captivity: O L-rd, as the streams in the dry land.” By ‘streams’ rain is meant, as it is said (II Samuel, 22:16), “And the channels of the sea appeared.”
Deuteronomy 11:13-17

13. And it will be, if you hearken to My commandments that I command you this day to love the L-rd, your G-d, and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, 14. I will give the rain of your land at its time, the early rain and the latter rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil. 15. And I will give grass in your field for your livestock, and you will eat and be sated. 16. Beware, lest your heart be misled, and you turn away and worship strange G-ds and prostrate yourselves before them. 17. And the wrath of the L-rd will be kindled against you, and He will close off the heavens, and there will be no rain, and the ground will not give its produce, and you will perish quickly from upon the good land that the L-rd gives you.

Pesikta Rabati, section 28 (also found in Midrash Shocher Tov 137), translation by Akiva Wolff

‘By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept…’ (Psalm 137:1). Why did the Jewish people cry by the rivers of Babylon? Rabbi Yochanan said, ‘The Euphrates (river) killed more of them than the wicked Nebuchadnetzer did. When the Jews lived in the land of Israel, they drank only rainwater, eshwater and springwater. When they were exiled to Babylon, they drank the (polluted) water of the Euphrates, and many of them died.’

Discussion Questions:
Rain is tied to our behavior, both in relationship to other people and our relationship with G-d. Notice that in the Shema, our interest in having clean water is intended to inspire us to righteous action.
1. What types of things inspire you to act correctly? Is clean water something you’d be inspired to work for?
2. How does the punishment of the polluted rivers of Babylon relate to our exile from the land of Israel?
3. Today many people in the world face waterborne disease and water scarcity. Can these sources teach us anything about changes needed to our behavior, even if the water we drink cannot be directly shared with them (since they live very far away)?

Part IV: The Importance of Water

ויקרא ובא אל במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה ובא אל במדבר ובא אל במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה ובא אל במדבר ובא אל במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה ובא אל במדבר ובא אל במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה ובא אל במדבר ובא אל במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה ובא אל במדבר ובא אל במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה ובא אל במדבר ובא אל במדבר ויקרא אליו את משה ובא אל ב📈ב�

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Just as water extends from one end of the world to the other, so too does Torah. Just as water is forever, so too is Torah. Just as water is from heaven, so too is Torah. Just as water makes great sounds, so too does Torah. Just as rain water comes down in drops and forms rivers, so with the Torah; one studies a bit today and some more tomorrow, until in time becomes like a flowing stream. Just as rain water is cleansing, the words of Torah are purifying. Just as living water extends from one end of the world to the other, so too does Torah. Just as water makes great sounds, so too does Torah. Just as water is a great equalizer, no matter your station or class, so too is Torah. Just as a scholar should not be ashamed to say to a simpler fellow, ‘Teach me a chapter, a verse or a letter’; just as living water is forever, so too is Torah. Just as water leaves humble. Water is a great equalizer, no matter your station or class, so too is Torah. Just as living water is forever, so too is Torah. Just as water is a great equalizer, no matter your station or class, so too is Torah.
will be very abundant, for these waters have come there, and wherever the stream flows, they shall be healed and live. 10. And it will be [a place] beside which fishermen will stand, from Ein-gedi to Ein-eglaim; a place for spreading nets they will be; their fish will be of many kinds, like the fish of the Great Sea, very many. 11. Its marshes and its pools will not be healed; they will be set aside for salt [mines]. 12. But by the stream, on its bank from either side, will grow every tree for food; its leaf will not wither, neither will its fruit end; month after month its fruits will ripen, for its waters will emanate from the Sanctuary, and its fruit shall be for food and its leaves for a cure.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. What is the relationship between water and Torah?
2. What is the relationship between water and redemption?
3. Do these connections explain some of the above questions about rejoicing over water?
4. How do these sources further clarify how important water is?