



ECCLESIASTES 3:15 AND A HOMILY ON PERSECUTION

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*I dedicate this lecture to the
memory of Sheila Shulman*

There appears to be a virtually inexhaustible reservoir of rabbinic exegeses of the biblical text (*midrashim*) which never fail to fascinate both by reason of their literary artistry and by their sophisticated manner of treating irksome theological questions. Reflections on the human lot, God's justice and the hope for ultimate redemption (to mention but a few subjects) are transmitted in a multiplicity of ways; each midrash provokes its audience to reconsider the issue from a new perspective, urged on by the ambiguities and complexities of the scriptural text. A galaxy of Midrashim which, as far as I know, have never been studied in any depth, deal with the themes just singled out, but in a very particular way. The human lot considered in this case is that of the persecuted or victim; God's justice is viewed through His preference for or rather selection of the victim; and this selection carries with it promise of final redemption and consolation for those who belong to the category of the persecuted.

In characteristic fashion the midrashim enunciate a general rule about their subject, and proceed to illustrate the point. Not exactly in praise of the victim, these texts do nevertheless stress that in the world of pursuer and pursued, the pursuer whoever they are, and regardless of the wickedness of their prey, can never have right on their side. This quietist attitude is approved by God whose stipulation about sacrifices reflects such an ideal—for Scripture singles out only tame or domesticated birds and animals for the sacrificial cult. Interestingly, this insight about the sacrifices was articulated many centuries before these midrashim reached their final redaction—the Hellenistic Jewish writers Aristeas, Philo and Josephus also justified the sacrificial and dietary laws along similar, but by no means identical lines—in keeping with their clearly apologetic purpose.

The midrash about the victim or *nirdaf* was clearly a favourite; for it occurs in several corpora of midrashim including Leviticus Rabba, Pesikta d'Rav Kahana, Tanhuma, Ecclesiastes Rabba and Midrash ha-Gadol, the oldest of which was redacted in the fifth century, the youngest in the thirteenth century. All these midrashim preserve a recognizable version of the homily. But there is also another version of the midrash that retains some of the essential elements of what may possibly be assumed to be the preconstituted text (we do not speak of 'original' when describing the formation of rabbinic texts). But the authors of this midrash transform or adapt the core material to create an entirely new composition. The new text was incorporated in the homiletical Midrash Pesikta Rabbati, which, like the Pesikta d'Rav Kahana, consists of collections of midrashim for the festivals and special Sabbaths. The notorious problem of dating rabbinic texts particularly applies to the Pesikta Rabbati which appears to be a composite work with some material suggesting a fifth or sixth century provenance while other material may be considerably younger. The first edition of

Pesikta Rabbati printed in Prague (1653) does not contain our text, but Friedmann inserted it into his standard edition, which was based on other manuscript witnesses that were also later discovered in other collections. By the eleventh-century the midrash had become familiar in respectable circles—the medieval exegete Rashi refers to the Pesikta Rabbati by name, and even cites our passage.

I

The home text of the midrash is Leviticus 22:27 “When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering by fire to the Lord.” It would appear that at one time this was the scriptural reading for the first day of Passover in Palestine. The elucidation of this verse is not the immediate object of the exegetical exercise. Rather, the composers of all versions of the midrash adopt the same rhetorical device in order to convey their reflections on the liturgical reading, a device which was undoubtedly meant to arouse their audience’s attention. For by means of this *‘petihah’*, or proem, they initiate their exegesis with the invocation of a verse that seems to bear no affinity with the reading for the day. But by a process of *‘harizah’*, beading the necklace—a string of proof texts and ideas—the homilist artfully guides his audience to the home verse. In the process connections are made between verses and new interpretations are skilfully developed. The idea of the unity of Scripture is implicitly supported by these kind of exegetical moves.

In the case of the midrash under discussion the chosen remote verse is somewhat obscure—the ancient rabbinic exegetes often deliberately selected the obscure verses as the most effective vehicle by which they could transmit their teachings. The verse in question is Ecclesiastes 3:15:

“That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been; and God seeks the pursued.”

מה-שְׁהָיָה כְּבָר הוּא, וְאֲשֶׁר לֵהְיוֹת כְּבָר הָיָה; וְהָאֱלֹהִים, יִבְקֹשׂ אֶת-נִרְדָּפֵי.

How do the three parts of the verse cohere and how should we understand the verb *yevakesh* ‘he will seek’ in this context? These are only a few of the problems that confront the reader of Ecclesiastes 3:15. Compounding the problem is the partially parallel Ecclesiastes 1:9 with its typically Qohelet sentiment expressed in its third leg: “What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun”. So what does “And God will seek that which is pursued” actually mean?

The Septuagint seems to understand the final verb of the verse to signify ‘persecuted’. The Vulgate, in contrast, preserves the idea of time in tune with the rest of the verse when it reads: ‘et Deus instaurat quod abiit’ ‘God repeats or renews what has passed away’ (A similar interpretation is given by the medieval Jewish exegete ibn Ezra). On the other hand, when the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (5:3) pronounces: “Do not say: Who is able to hold power—for the Lord seeks those that are pursued”¹ we would have some grounds for supposing that it is echoing the older parallel in Ecclesiastes and conveying some vague notion of divine recompense for the suffering of the persecuted. As we will see, the rabbis, too, seem to have thought about the verse with this meaning in mind.

¹ אל תאמר מי יוכל כחו כי ה' מבקש נרדפים

II

Ecclesiastes 3:15 in its entirety serves as the proem verse for all these Midrashim. The constraints of time are such that I can only concentrate on the third part of the verse, 'And God seeks the pursued'. But it would not do due justice to the Midrash and its very particular take on Ecclesiastes 3:15 if I were to disregard the first sections of this remarkable text. The following is therefore a brief synopsis of the first two parts of the Midrash—and you will have to take on trust my version and interpretation.

The immediate impression on reading the verse is a typical Kohelet feast—a cycle of entwined time in which God is somehow involved. The rabbis detected a tone of insistence in the verse "that which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been" and suggested a way of interpreting the underlying conversation. They read the verse's first two pronouncements as a refutation of the 'doubting Thomas'. It is addressed to those who would doubt the supernatural: that Adam would have enjoyed eternal life had he not sinned, or that God is capable of reviving the dead. Elijah is put forward as an example of a human being who achieved immortality—he was and still is—while Elijah, himself, Elisha and Ezekiel are brought forward as prime testimonies to past and future resurrection. These human, admittedly extraordinary, figures testify to the miraculous manipulation of existence. As for God, in the past, He assembled the waters at creation, and unleashed them at the time of the flood. Waters dried up when the Israelites left Egypt and experienced their first redemption; similarly, in the future at the moment of final redemption waters will run dry, but Israel's pursuers will drown. A second exodus from Egypt is predicted in Isaiah's prophecy (11:15,16): 'And the Lord shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea and with His mighty wind shall He shake His hand over the river and smite it in the seven streams ... just as it was in the day that he came out of the land of Egypt and the pursuers were drowned'.

It is at this point, with the promise of redemption and restoration of sovereign power hovering in the air, that the midrash addresses the third and final part of the verse 'and God seeks the pursued'. The theme of God's preference for the pursued is delivered by Rabbi Huna. (Nowadays we are very careful not to take attributions in rabbinic texts at face value, but it may be worthwhile to note that Huna lived at the time of the disastrous uprising against Gallus in the fourth century.) The principle that I already outlined above is articulated particularly unambiguously. Better to be downtrodden whoever you are. The notable ancestors of the Israelites were pursued. I should note here that in some of the cases the hounding of the victims is not actually documented in the scriptural text, but derived from popular later rewriting of the biblical narrative. The homilist simply assumes that his audience is familiar with these stories. The scriptural proof-texts listed here are meant to elucidate the meaning of 'seeks' (*yevakesh*). As you peruse the list it emerges that the rabbis are reading this seeking as a 'seeking out', namely, a choice. The purpose of each example is to prove that God's elect are the persecuted. According to literary convention the climax of the homily must achieve a meaningful connection to the lectionary verse. Here, the reflections on the victim become a means of endowing significance to the sacrifices described in Leviticus. "Since the bullock is pursued by the lion, the sheep by the wolf, the goat by the leopard, the Holy One blessed be He said: 'Only offer Me those that are pursued, not those that pursue'. "When a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat is born ... (Leviticus 22:27)." You may recognize the wild animals that the verse singles out—these are the lion, wolf and leopard that lie down with the tame animals in Isaiah's famous prophecy "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together" (11:6). It is not implausible that the homilist wanted his audience to imagine themselves in comparable utopian conditions. The pursued, the victims, are God's elect—in the messianic future, the wild animals will lose their predatory instinct and cease to pursue their prey. If this is only implied, what is certain is that the interpretation of the sacrifices requested by God is meant somehow to relate to people's own experience. In the youngest of the versions, the thirteenth-century Midrash ha-Gadol, the moralistic element is emphasized when it concludes the entire Midrash with a quotation from Baba Kama in the Babylonian Talmud (93a) in the name of the Palestinian Amora Rabbi Abbahu: "one should strive to be of

the persecuted rather than of the persecutors as there is none among the birds more persecuted than doves and pigeons, and yet Scripture made them eligible for the altar.”

Rabbinic Midrashim are not philosophical discourses nor do they attempt to provide a systematic framework for their conceptions of Scripture. And yet, this particular argument about the chosen sacrificial animals bears much affinity to those of the Jewish representative writers of the Hellenistic age who did indeed apply philosophical concepts in their interpretation of Judaism. Take for example pseudo Aristeas. According to his famous account of the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek Eleazar, the high-priest gave a speech on the meaning of the laws in the Hebrew Bible. In the course of his homily he stated: “... in reference also to the calves and rams and goats which are offered, he [Moses] said that it was necessary to take them from the herds and flocks, and sacrifice tame animals and offer nothing wild, that the offerers of the sacrifices might understand the symbolic meaning of the lawgiver and not be under the influence of an arrogant self-consciousness. For he, who offers a sacrifice makes an offering also of his own soul in all its moods.” Pseudo Aristeas appears to be making much the same point as do the rabbis although it must be admitted that he uses different terminology and rather more abstract reasoning. Significantly, he appears to be claiming that his interpretation is the true meaning of the biblical law under discussion. For the rabbis, however, this interpretation is presented as just one way of reading the scriptural text.

III

The puzzling words of Ecclesiastes 3:15 provoked a fascinating response from the homilists of Pesikta d’Rav Kahana and the other midrashim. The idea of God’s predilection for the victim is also present in the later Midrash Pesiqta Rabbati, but it is so thoroughly reworked that we may justifiably describe the entire text as a new midrashic creation.

Indeed, right from the outset the idea of the elect is intertwined with the idea of love and hatred. The ‘pursued’ are not simply God’s chosen, but his beloved. Here the prooftexts are far fewer with concentration on the strong emotions of the three Patriarchs. The homilist sets out to explain why particular ancestors might have become the object of God’s love—apparently the scriptural narrative was not self-explanatory. Thus, Hagar’s ‘laughing at’ (מצחק) Isaac that led to Sarah’s wish to have Ishmael banished, is seen in the light of a verse in Proverbs where the same verb to ‘laugh at’ or ‘deride’ is used in a context of hostilities that promise death to the victim. In this way, Ishmael’s banishment, at first glance totally inexplicable, becomes justified. Having dispensed with Ishmael God’s love for Isaac is then explored. Abraham is presented as an exemplary father. He rebuffs the suggestion that he has a favorite son with the powerful image, “are there boundaries within the womb?”

The third and typologically significant patriarch is then introduced with all the implications of the confrontation between Israel and Rome—for the homilist points to Amos’ denunciation of Edom for pursuing his brother and to Malachi’s pronouncement of God’s love for Jacob and hatred of Esau. These images undoubtedly reflect a fairly common identification of Edom with pagan or Christian Rome, with its negative associations as the oppressor of Israel, fated to receive its final comeuppance at the end of days. And once again in this context, God’s apparently irrational love for Jacob who is hounded by Esau becomes understandable and apparently defensible.

In a momentous transition from the wandering patriarchs to David and monarchy, the homilist flags another victim from ancient Israel who represents both past and future, an ancient example of God’s love and election that also symbolizes restoration and restitution.

As in the other midrashim the homilist gradually forges the connection between all these reflections on God's seeking out of the persecuted with the lectionary verse about the sacrifices. Unlike the other midrashim, however, the exegete inserts a small digression about three beautiful birds—the peacocks, pheasants and geese—which were not offered up on the divine table. According to the Talmudic tractate Baba Kama (55a) these birds represent different species. Yet again, the homilist felt a compulsion to justify the particulars of the sacrificial cult. The three specimens, though handsome, had no place at the altar for they failed to pass the 'the victim' test. This prize was reserved for the 'persecuted', namely, the turtledoves and young pigeons along with the bullocks, sheep and goats.

How does God seek those who are pursued? The verse in Ecclesiastes is certainly ambiguous—generations of biblical scholars have attempted to turn the verse in all directions, usually offering one or two similar solutions. The authors of our midrashim chose one interpretation that killed two birds with one stone. We are offered a way of thinking about the biblical sacrificial cult. Though certainly obsolete in the time of the audience, the sacrifices were part of their liturgical cycle and therefore still significant as part of their living tradition. A new perspective on the unchanging text of Scripture was always appreciated among Jews wherever they were. Indeed, it is impossible to pinpoint the historical context in which these midrashim were produced, but it is not implausible that the composers of the texts, even if they did not live in truly 'lachrymose' conditions, did regard themselves as the underdogs in relation to the society in which they lived. The topos of the persecuted was of course not restricted to Jewish exegetes. An amazing parallel with a Christological focus to our midrash is to be found in the *Demonstrations* of the Syriac fourth-century homilist Aphrahat. His homily 'On Persecution' may be read as a response to persecution or, and in addition, may reflect a polemical discussion with Jews. Alternatively, we might even suggest that the midrash is actually an implicit answer to Christians who pointed to the persecuted status of the Jews as a proof of their rejection by God. We shall probably never know. What is certain is that this way of reading of the third element in Ecclesiastes 3:15 somehow resonated with generations of readers of the biblical text. The translator of the Aramaic paraphrase of Ecclesiastes (Targum) dated not earlier than the seventh century seems to be thinking in this manner when he renders the verse: "And on the great day of judgement, the Lord will seek the needy and the poor from the hands of the wicked who pursue him."

Scriptural reading for the first day of Passover

Leviticus 22,27

When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall stay seven days with its mother and from the eighth day on it shall be acceptable as an offering by fire to the Lord.

Wenn ein Ochs oder Lamm oder Ziege geboren ist, so soll es sieben Tage bei seiner Mutter sein, und am achten Tage und darnach mag man's dem HERRN opfern, so ist's angenehm.

שׁוֹר אֹ-כֶשֶׁב אֹ-עֵז כִּי יוֹלֵד, וְהָיָה שְׁבַעַת יָמִים תַּחַת אִמּוֹ; וּמִיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי, וְהִלָּאָה, יִרְצָה, לְקַרְבַּן אֲשֶׁה לַיהוָה.

Proem verse

Ecclesiastes 3,15

That which is hath been long ago, and that which is to be hath already been; and God seeketh that which is pursued [or gone].

Was geschieht, das ist schon längst gewesen, und was sein wird, ist auch schon längst gewesen; und Gott holt wieder hervor, was vergangen ist

מֵה-שֶׁהָיָה כָּבֹד הוּא, וְאֲשֶׁר לְהִיּוֹת כָּבֹד הָיָה; וְהֶאֱלֹהִים, יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת-נִרְדָּף.

Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 9:4

והאלהים יבקש את נרדף (קהלה ג:טו). רב חונה בשם רב יוסף עתיד הקב"ה לתבוע דמן של נרדפים מיד הרודפיהם. צדיק רודף צדיק, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף. רשע רודף רשע, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף. רשע רודף צדיק, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף. אפי' את חוזר ואו' צדיק רודף אחר רשע, מכל מקום והאלהים יבקש את נרדף. תדע לך שהוא כן, שהרי הבל נרדף מפני קין, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, וישע יי' אל הבל ואל מנחתו (בראשית ד:ד). נח נרדף מפני דורו, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, ונח מצא חן בעיני יי' שם נח. אברהם נרדף מפני נמרוד, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, אתה הוא יי' האלהים אשר בחרת באברהם. וג' (חפיה ס:ו). יצחק נרדף מפני פלשתים, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, ויאמרו ראה ראינו כי היה יי' עמך וג' (בראשית כ:כח). יעקב נרדף מפני עשו, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, כי יעקב בחר לו יה (תהלים קלה:ד). יוסף נרדף מפני אחיו, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, ויהי יי' את יוסף ויהי איש מצליח (בראשית לט:ב). משה נרדף מפני פרעה, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, ויאמר להשמדם לולי משה בחירו וג' (תהלים קכג:ג). ישר' נרדפים מפני אומות העולם, והאלהים יבקש את נרדף, ובך בחר יי' אלהיך להיות לו לעם סגולה וג' (דברים יד:כז). ר' יודה בר' סימון בשם ר' יוסה בר נהורי אף כאן שור נרדף מפני הארי, כשב מפני זאב, עז מפני נמר, א' הקב"ה לא תביאו קרבן לפני מן הרודפים אלא מן הנרדפים, שור או כשב או עז כי יולד וגו' (ויקרא כב:כז).

Pesiqta de Rav Kahana 9:4

Translation: William Braude

God seeketh the pursued (Eccles. 3:15). R. Huna said in the name of R. Joseph: The Holy One will demand the blood of the pursued from the hand of those who pursued them. When a righteous man pursues a righteous man, "God seeks the one pursued." When a wicked man pursues a wicked one, "God seeks the one pursued." When a wicked man pursues a righteous man, "God seeks the one pursued." Even if you were to turn the matter about and speak of a righteous man pursuing a wicked one, nonetheless "God seeks the one pursued." You can see for yourself that He does so in this world, for Abel was pursued by Cain. "And in His seeking the one pursued, *The Lord looked for Abel and his offering* (Gen. 4:4). Noah was pursued by his generation. Therefore, since "God seeks the one pursued," *Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord* (Gen. 6:8). Abraham was pursued by Nimrod. Therefore, since "God seeks the one pursued," Scripture says, *Thou art the Lord, the God, who didst choose Abram* (Neh. 9:7). Isaac was pursued by the Philistines. Therefore, since "God seeks the one pursued," the Philistines were forced to say, *We saw plainly that the Lord was with thee* (Gen. 26:28). Jacob was pursued by Esau. Therefore, since "God seeks the one pursued," *The Lord hath chosen Jacob unto Himself* (Ps. 135:4). Joseph was pursued by his brothers. Therefore, since "God seeks the one pursued," *The Lord was with Joseph, and made all that he did to prosper* (Gen. 39:2). Moses was pursued by Pharaoh. Therefore, since "God seeks the one pursued," *He said that He would destroy them, but for Moses His chosen* (Ps. 106:23). Israel are pursued by the nations of the earth. Therefore, since "God seeks the one pursued," *The Lord hath chosen thee to be His own treasure* (Deut. 14:2).

R. Judah bar R. Simon said in the name of R. Jose bar Nehorai: Since the bullock is pursued by the lion, the sheep by the wolf, the goat by the leopard, the Holy One said: Bring no offering before Me of those that pursue—only of those that are pursued: *When a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat is brought forth*, etc. (Lev. 22:27).

Übersetzung: August Wünsche

Es heisst Koh. 3,15: „Und Gott sucht den Verfolgten.“ R. Huna hat im Namen des R. Jose gesagt: Gott wird einst das Recht der Verfolgten von ihren Verfolgern fordern. Ein Gerechter verfolgt einen Gerechten, und Gott wird den Verfolgten suchen; ein Frevler verfolgt einen Frevler, und Gott wird den Verfolgten suchen; ein Frevler verfolgt einen Gerechten, und Gott wird den Verfolgten suchen, selbst wenn ein Gerechter einen Frevler verfolgt, so wird Gott den Verfolgten suchen an jedem Orte. Du kannst es daraus erkennen, dass es so ist: Abel wurde von Kain verfolgt, und Gott suchte den Verfolgten, wie es heisst Gen. 4, 4: „Der Ewige blickte auf Abel und auf seine Opfergabe.“ Noach wurde von seinen Zeitgenossen verfolgt, und Gott suchte den Verfolgten, wie es heisst daselbst 6,8: „Und Noach fand Gnade in den Augen des Ewigen.“ Abraham wurde von Nimrod verfolgt, und Gott suchte den Verfolgten, wie es heisst Nechem. 9,7: „Du bist es, Ewiger, Gott, der du Abram erwählt hast.“ Jizchak wurde von den Philistern verfolgt, und Gott suchte den Verfolgten, wie es heisst Gen. 26,28: „Wir haben gesehen, dass der Ewige mit dir ist.“ Jacob wurde von Esau verfolgt, und Gott suchte den Verfolgten, wie es heisst Ps. 135,4: „Jacob hat sich Gott erkoren.“ Joseph wurde von seinen Brüdern verfolgt, und Gott suchte den Verfolgten, wie es heisst Gen. 39,21: „Und der Ewige war mit Joseph, und er war ein Mann, dem alles gelang.“ Mose wurde von Pharao verfolgt, und Gott suchte den Verfolgten, wie es heisst Ps. 106,23: „Und er wollte sie vertilgen, wenn Mose sein Erwählter nicht gewesen wäre.“ Die Israeliten werden von den Völkern verfolgt, und Gott sucht den Verfolgten, wie es heisst Deut. 14,2: „Dich hat der Ewige erwählt von allen Nationen zu seinem eigenthümlichen Volke.“

R. Judan im Namen des R. Simon im Namen des R. Josse bar Nehorai hat gesagt: So verhält es sich auch mit den Opfern. Gott sprach: Der Ochs wird vom Löwen verfolgt, das Schaf wird vom Wolf verfolgt, die Ziege wird vom Tiger verfolgt, opfert vor mir nicht von den Verfolgern, sondern von den Verfolgten. Das steht nun auch hier: „Ein Ochs oder ein Schaf oder eine Ziege, so es geboren worden.“

וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת
 נִרְדָּף לְעוֹלָם הַקְּבִיָּה אוֹהֵב (לֹא) אֶת הַנִּרְדָּפִים וְשׁוֹנֵא (לֹא) אֶת הַנִּרְדָּפִים. וְשִׁמְעָאֵל
 רֹדֵף אֶת יִצְחָק אַחִיו וְתֵרָא שְׂרָה אֶת בֶּן הַגֵּר הַמְצֵרִית וְגו' (נִלְחָטִים כִּי־ט') שֶׁהִיא
 זֹרֵק עֲלָיו חֲצִים כְּמִתְלַהֵלָה הַיּוֹרֵה זְקִים חֲצִים וּמֹת [וְגו'] וְאָמַר הֲלֹא מִצְחָק אֲנִי (מִשְׁלִי
 כִּי יִיט וְיִט) כֵּן לְפִיכֵךְ הַקְּבִיָּה אוֹהֵב אֶת יִצְחָק. קַח נָא אֶת בְּנֵךְ (נִלְחָטִים כִּי־ז')
 אֵיל אַבְרָהָם אֲבִינוּ רַב־שֵׁעַ יֵשׁ לִי שְׁנֵי בָנִים נִתְתָּה לִי יִצְחָק וְיִשְׁמַעְאֵל. אֵיל אֶת
 יַחֲדָךְ (טס) אֵיל רַב־שֵׁעַ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחֲדָיִם יִצְחָק יַחֲדָיִם לְשֵׁרָה וְיִשְׁמַעְאֵל יַחֲדָיִם לְהַגֵּר.
 אֵיל אֶת שְׂרָה בַת (טס) אֵיל וְכִי יֵשׁ תְּחוּמִים כְּמַעִים לְשְׁנֵיהֶם אֲנִי אוֹהֵב. אֵיל אֶת
 יִצְחָק (טס) לְיִצְחָק אֲנִי אוֹהֵב שֶׁהוּא נִרְדָּף (כג). כֵּךְ עָשׂוּ רֹדֵף אַחֵר יַעֲקֹב עַל רִדְפוֹ
 בְּחָרֵב אַחִיו וְשַׁחַת רַחֲמָיו (עֲנוּס' א' י"ח) אָמַר הַקְּבִיָּה אוֹהֵב אֲנִי לְנִרְדָּף וְשׁוֹנֵא לְרֹדֵף
 וְאֵת עָשׂוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם (מִלְחָמָה א' ג') אֲבָל יַעֲקֹב וְאוֹהֵב אֶת יַעֲקֹב (טס טס ז'). לְמַה.
 וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת נִרְדָּף. דוֹר נִרְדָּף וְשׁוֹנֵא רֹדֵף אֶת הַקְּבִיָּה אוֹהֵב אֲנִי
 לְנִרְדָּף וְשׁוֹנֵא אֲנִי לְרֹדֵף קִרְעֵה זֶה אֶת הַמְּטַלְכָה וְנִתְנָה לְרַעַךְ (שְׁמוֹלֵל א' ט"ו כ"ה) לְדוֹד
 דֵּה אֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת נִרְדָּף. [הַרִי] בְּכַנֵּי אֲדָם שֶׁהַקְּבִיָּה אוֹהֵב אֶת הַנִּרְדָּפִים מִנֵּיִן
 אֶף בְּעוֹף וּבְבֵהֵמָה. אֶת טוֹצָא בְּשַׁעֲהָ שֶׁהַקְּבִיָּה אָמַר לְמִשָּׁה עַל הַקְּרִבָּנוֹת הִיא מִשָּׁה
 סְבוּרָה (טְהַקְּבִיָּה אֲמַל לְמַסָּה עַל הַקְּרִבָּנוֹת) שִׁיקְרִיב טוֹוֹסִים אוֹ סְסִיוֹנִים אוֹ אוֹוִים. וְלֹא אָמַר
 לוֹ כֵּךְ אֲלֵא וְאִם טָן הָעוֹף עוֹלָה קְרִבְנוֹ לְהִי. וְהַקְּרִיב טָן הַתּוֹרִים אוֹ מִן בְּנֵי הַיּוֹנָה
 (וַיִּקְרָא א' י"ד) (וְכָל אֲמַר הַלְמוֹר) [וְלֹא צְפוֹר אַחֵר] אָמַר הַקְּבִיָּה הוֹאֵל שֶׁהֵם נִרְדָּפִים
 מֵהֶם (לְמַנְקֵשׁ) [מִנְקֵשׁ] אֲנִי קְרִבְנֵי וְהָאֱלֹהִים יִבְקֹשׁ אֶת נִרְדָּף שׁוֹר אוֹ כֶּשֶׁב
 אוֹ עוֹ כֵד.

Pesiqta Rabbati 48:2

Translation: William Braude

And God seeketh that which is pursued. The Holy One, blessed be He, [says]: I always love the pursued and hate the pursuers, as when Ishmael pursued his brother Isaac—*And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian ... making sport* (Gen 21:9). Because Ishmael shot arrows at Isaac—*As one who makes sport by shooting deadly arrows ... and saith, "Am nor I in sport?"* (Prov. 26:18-19)—the Holy One, blessed be He, loved Isaac, saying to Abraham *Take now thy son* (Gen. 22:2). Our father Abraham replied: I have two sons. Thou hast given me Isaac and Ishmael. God said: *Thine only son* (*ibid.*). Abraham replied: Both are only sons; Isaac is an only son to Sarah and Ishmael an only son to Hagar. God said: *Whom thou lovest* (*ibid.*). Abraham replied: Are there different areas of love within a man—one of more love for one son and one of less love for the other? I love both of them. God declared: *Even Isaac*—for it is Isaac I love because he is pursued.

When Esau relentlessly pursued Jacob—*Because he did pursue his brother with the sword, and did cast off all pity* (Amos 1:11)—the Holy One, blessed be He, said: I love the pursued and hate the pursuer: *Esau I hated* (Mal. 1:3), but Jacob—*I loved Jacob* (Mal. 1:2). Why? Because *God seeketh [with love] that which is pursued.*

David was pursued—Saul pursued him. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: I love him that is pursued and hate the pursuer. Hence God said to Saul: *The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee ... and hath given it to a neighbour of thine* (1 Sam. 15:28)—that is, to David. Because *God seeketh [with love] that which is pursued.*

Thus you see that the Holy One, blessed be He, loves those among the children of men who are pursued. Whence do we know He feels the same way about bird and cattle? You find that when the Holy One, blessed be He, spoke to Moses about the offerings, Moses supposed that he would be asked to offer up peacocks, or pheasants, or geese. However these were not what God asked of him. As Scripture says, *If his offering to the Lord be a burnt offering of fowls, then he shall bring his offering of turtledoves, or of young pigeons* (Lev. 1:14), of which the Holy One, blessed be He, said: Because they are pursued, I would have an offering of them. *God seeketh [with love] that which is pursued* [and easily overcome]: a bullock, or a sheep, or a goat.

Und Gott sucht das, was verfolgt wird. Der Heilige, gelobt sei Er, [sagt]: Ich liebe immer die Verfolgten und hasse die Verfolger, wie als Ischmael seinen Bruder Isaac verfolgte – *Und Sarah sah den Sohn Hagers der Ägypterin ... der spottete* (Gen 21,19). Weil Ischmael Pfeile auf Isaac schoss – *Wie einer, der spottet, indem er tödliche Pfeile schießt ... und sagt, „Mache ich nicht Sport?“* (Spr 26,18-19) – der Heilige, gelobt sei Er, liebte Isaac und sagte zu Abraham, *Nimm deinen Sohn* (Gen 22,2). Unser Vater Abraham antwortete: Ich habe zwei Söhne. Du hast mir Isaac und Ischmael gegeben. Gott sagte: *Deinen einzigen Sohn* (*ebd.*). Abraham antwortete: Beide sind einzige Söhne; Isaac ist ein einziger Sohn für Sarah und Ischmael ein einziger Sohn für Hagar. Gott sagte: *Den du liebst* (*ebd.*). Abraham antwortete: Gibt es verschiedene Bereiche der Liebe innerhalb eines Mannes – einen mit mehr Liebe für den einen Sohn und einen mit weniger Liebe für den anderen? Ich liebe sie beide. Gott erklärte: *Isaac* – denn es ist Isaac, den ich liebe, weil er verfolgt wird.

Als Esau unaufhörlich Jakob verfolgte – *Weil er seinen Bruder mit einem Schwert verfolgte und jedes Mitleid unterdrückte* (Amos 1,11) – sagte der Heilige, gelobt sei Er: Ich liebe den Verfolgten und hasse den Verfolger: *Esau habe ich gehasst* (Mal 1,3), aber Jakob – *Ich habe Jakob geliebt* (Mal 1,2). Warum? Weil Gott *[mit Liebe] dasjenige sucht, das verfolgt wird.*

David wurde verfolgt – Saul hat ihn verfolgt. Der Heilige, gelobt sei Er, sagte: Ich liebe den, der verfolgt wird und hasse den Verfolger. Deswegen sagte Gott zu Saul: *Der Herr hat dir das Reich Israel entrissen ... und hat es einem deiner Nächsten gegeben* (1 Sam 15,28) – das heißt, dem David. Weil Gott *[mit Liebe] dasjenige sucht, das verfolgt wird.*

So siehst du, dass der Heilige, gelobt sei Er, jene unter den Menschenkindern liebt, die verfolgt werden. Woher wissen wir, dass Er dasselbe in Bezug auf Vögel und Vieh fühlt? Du findest, dass als der Heilige, gelobt sei Er, mit Mose über die Darbringungen sprach, Mose annahm, dass er gebeten würde, Pfaue oder Fasane oder Gänse darzubieten. Diese jedoch waren nicht, was Gott von ihm erbat. Wie die Schrift sagt: *Ist seine Opfergabe für den Herrn ein Brandopfer vom Geflügel, dann soll er eine Turteltaube oder eine junge Taube bringen* (Lev 1,14), von denen der Heilige, gelobt sei Er, sagte: Weil sie verfolgt werden, will ich eine Darbringung von ihnen haben. *Gott sucht [mit Liebe] dasjenige, das verfolgt wird* [und das leicht überwältigt wird]: einen Ochsen oder ein Schaf oder eine Ziege.

Übersetzung aus dem Englischen: Sr. Katherine Wolff