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"Weeping As a Widow"
The Themes of Mourning and Consolation in the *Pisqa'ot* of Admonition and Consolation in *Pesiqta Rabbati* (Chapters 26-37)

by Boaz David Heilman

Pesiqta Rabbati is a midrashic collection dating from the fifth century, B.C.E. It consists of sermons on the Scriptural readings for the holidays and special Sabbaths in the Jewish calendar. A series of these sermons—called *pisqa'ot*—is intended for the three Sabbaths before Tish`ah be-'Av, called Sabbaths of Mourning and Admonition, for the day of mourning itself, and for the seven Sabbaths following it, called Sabbaths of Consolation.

Using extant Hebrew manuscripts, editions and English translations of *Pesiqta Rabbati*, other primary sources—parallel sections in other midrashic collections, the Talmud, and liturgical sources—as well as secondary sources, a close study of the *pisqa'ot* was undertaken. The goal of this study was to discern the hand of a redactor, if present, unifying the individual units or chapters into a larger whole.

The focus of the study was on the symbols, motifs, and thematic issues that recur throughout the *pisqa'ot* and serve to unite them.

The results of the study underscore the intent and goal of the author of the *pisqa'ot* : To explain the meaning and purpose of Jewish life, despite the hardships and persecutions it often entailed. To that end, the author/redactor made masterful use of symbols and motifs, creating a work that gave vent to the grief and dismay of the Jewish people, and provided it with a reason to continue hoping and praying for future redemption.

The thesis is divided into five sections: An introduction; an overview of the development of midrash, specifically *Pesiqta Rabbati* ; an interpretative analysis of *Pisqa'ot* 26-37; an analysis of the symbols, motifs and thematic issues found in these *pisqa'ot* ; and a conclusion. A bibliography appears at the end.

It is the hope of the author of this thesis that his work will contribute to the understanding of this midrash, as well as of its role in the ongoing and long-lived exploration of the role of God in the life of the Jewish People.

"WEEPING AS A WIDOW"

The Themes of Mourning and Consolation in the *Pisqa'ot* of Admonition and Consolation in *Pesiqta Rabbati* (Chapters 26-37)

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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
Graduate Rabbinic Program
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Advisor: Dr. Norman Cohen

For Hannah and Yoni

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I can honestly say that all I have achieved during this incredible journey is due as much to Sally, Hannah and Yoni as to anything I have done.

Finally, a word of thanks to my friends at Congregation B'nai Torah of Sudbury, Massachusetts, who have been cheering me along for the past few months, and whose patience and understanding have made it possible for me to practice what I have learned, and to learn what I practice.

I thank and praise God for granting me life, for sustaining me, and for enabling me to reach this moment.

New York

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11 Adar, 5758

Introduction

Introduction

Studying Midrash *Pesiqta Rabbati* was my reintroduction to Rabbinic literature. I had learned some midrashic material when I was a child in Israel, and then, for a short time, at a Jewish day school in Los Angeles. But since that time, "long ago and far away," I had delved into another world, that of music.

When I decided to enter rabbinic school, I was in my mid-forties, and ready for it. It was, in a sense, a homecoming. Still, on the first day of school, in late August, 1995, sitting at that student's desk and anticipating my first class, I did not know exactly what to expect.

Rabbi Norman Cohen came into the classroom, a copy of *Pesiqta Rabbati* in his hands. He introduced the material, calling it his "first love." Nevertheless, his first lecture, which was on the evolution of the different editions of the *Rabbati* , had me quite unsettled. I didn't want to learn *about* the work; knowing that *pisqa* meant "independent chapter" or "unit," was enough background for me. I was eager to dive *into* the material itself, to see what light it could shed on my ancient background. Happily, we did that quite soon afterwards, and I was not disappointed.

My first exposure to the *pisqa'ot* for Tish`ah be-'Av began with an assignment: An analysis of *Pisqa* 29, *Bakho tivkeh ba-llayla* — "Weeping, she weeps in the night." As I sat in the library and analyzed the *pisqa* in *hevruta* with some fellow students, I found myself intrigued by the ancient text. The poetic use of the language, the depth of feeling, the imagery, and, above all, the light that the midrash shed on the cataclysmic event that precipitated modern Judaism—the destruction of the Temple—had me entranced

Perhaps, it was because I am a second generation survivor of the Holocaust. Even in my choice of repertoire, back in the days when I was immersed in the world of music, I preferred music that was more serious than light-hearted in nature. I found myself more moved by the darker colors and intense emotions of a late Beethoven sonata than by Lisztian virtuosic display—which struck me as shallow entertainment.

In one of the early classes, following the reading of a certain *pisqa,* Rabbi Cohen asked if we thought the material was "great art" or mere story telling. I knew then that I found the match for the music world I had left.

Towards the end of the semester, Rabbi Cohen assigned the final paper. The assignment was to draw a comparison between a *pisqa* from *Pesiqta Rabbati* and its parallel from that collection's older sibling, *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana.* I asked Dr. Cohen for suggestions; perhaps because he understood me and my penchant for the darker, more intense colors, Rabbi Cohen suggested *Pisqa* 32, *`Aniyah So`arah* — "O thou, afflicted, tossed with tempest."

When I was finished with my analysis, I knew I had found the topic for my thesis: The *pisqa'ot* ("chapters") for Tish`ah be-'Av. I would study how the rabbis viewed the historical/theological catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Temple, and how they restructured Jewish life and law so that it could prevail in the stormy times ahead. I would look at techniques and stylistic traits, and I would draw conclusions that would parallel the state of Judaism in our day, in the years following our own Holocaust. Aside from the intellectual quest, however, what I wanted to explore was the emotional aspect of the events described by the Rabbis. I wanted to feel what the Rabbis must have felt; their despondence, as they realized that the darkness of exile was not about to end any time soon; the elation and the hope that they discovered at the

core of the darkness. Above all, I wanted to understand how they enabled themselves and the rest of the Jewish people to prevail against the awesome forces that threatened to crush them time and time again.

Delving eagerly into the material, I was not quite prepared for what I did find. It was all I was hoping for, and much more. Some of what I discovered may be found in the pages that follow.

The first part of this thesis is an overview of Midrash *Pesiqta Rabbati*, specifically the *pisqa'ot* for Tish`ah be-'Av. Included in this section are:

1) A general survey of the historical evolution of the practice of Scriptural readings in the framework of a liturgical service, from the time of Ezra through the Talmudists. The emergence of the "Triennial Cycle" and the "Annual Cycle" of the readings of the Torah is shown. The use made of selections from the Prophets and Writings by preachers to explain the meaning of the Torah readings is explained. The artful inclusion of folk material, lore and Jewish law in sermons is described as the beginning of midrash. The use of midrashic material and religious poetry—the *piyyut* —in combination with Scriptural material, for the purpose of effecting changes in Jewish custom and cosmology, is shown to be the goal of the midrashists.

2) An explanation of the emergence of midrashic collections such as *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* and the *Pesiqta Rabbati* , as filling a special need in the community. The growth of the Jewish communities in the Diaspora and the parallel decline of Israel as the traditional source of authority over Jewish life and law presented new difficulties. Along with assimilation, came intense persecution. The early Rabbis recognized the need to redefine the relationship between Israel and God, and to restate the mutual expectations and hopes that

ensued from this relationship. They saw as crucial the need to bolster Israel's faith in itself, as well as to give meaning and purpose to its suffering.

The best venue for achieving these goals was the Sabbath and the festival days, "the leisure days of the Jewish calendar."[1] The means the Rabbis employed was the Scriptural readings and the sermon. The sermonic collections, the *Pesiqta'ot* , are both the resources and the result of their work.

3) A survey of *Pisqa'ot* 26-37 in *Pesiqta Rabbati.*

These homilies concern themselves with Tish`ah be-'Av, the day set aside by the Rabbis to commemorate the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Three Sabbaths of Mourning and Admonition precede the fast day; seven Sabbaths of Consolation follow it. The special Scriptural readings designated for these ten Sabbaths, as for Tish`ah be-'Av itself, are meant to channel Israel's grief and transform it into hope. The material contained in the sermons is as varied as the Scriptural readings and derives from many sources. Close study of the *pisqa'ot* reveals not only the midrashists' brilliant mastery of the Scriptural texts, but also their cleverness and inventiveness, as they interweave these texts in such a way as to further their goals and educate their followers.

Though deriving from at least five different sources, the midrashic material shows a great deal of editing and redacting. Themes, ideas, and large issues are woven into the fabric of the midrash; motifs—whether words or concepts—appear and reappear through the *pisqa'ot* , serving to connect the individual chapters one to another. Three divisions begin to emerge—admonition, consolation, and redemption—all forming a larger whole.

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[1] Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached, Prolegomena,* p. 4.

Part Two of this thesis represents an attempt to analyze the individual *pisqa'ot,* offering an interpretation based on the symbols and motifs that serve to unify them and further their message. A word or two, at this point, on the form of a *pisqa* may be helpful.

A *pisqa* is usually composed of three sections: the *petiḥta* (plural: *petiḥta'ot*), or opening remarks; *gufa* , the body of the sermon; and *neḥemta*, the closing section, offering consolation to Israel. These, in turn, may be comprised of one, two, and sometimes more, smaller sections, each usually standing independent of its neighbor. The *gufa* of the homily may be made up of any number of commentaries, each representing the words of a different rabbi or midrashist, and all pertaining to the text of the Scriptural reading for the day.

The *petiḥta*, which serves as opening remarks or an introduction to the sermon, also may be shaped in certain forms. A circular *petiḥta*, for example, typically opens with a verse that seems totally unrelated to the day's Scriptural reading. The midrashist will expound on that and, at the end of his comments, return to it, having, meanwhile, shown a connection between the text with which he had opened and the text—the pericope—of the *gufa*. An *halakhic petiḥta*, on the other hand, will open with a question relating to Jewish law, posed by an anonymous questioner; the answer, usually ascribed to an authoritative figure, will lead to commentary that ties the *halakha* in question to either the Scriptural reading or to a commentary on it.

The *Pesiqta'ot* came into being through a process of accumulation: One commentary would inspire—or recall—another. There was little attempt made to edit or redact the material. Copied by hand, the manuscripts reveal variances based on misunderstandings, different readings and interpretations, and human

error. The dearth of scholarly work, previous to the last half of the nineteenth century, contributes to the obstacles standing in the way of the study of the *Pesiqta'ot.*

In the interpretations of the *pisqa'ot* that are offered in Part Two of this thesis, there is a certain amount of simplification that is meant to clarify the story line and highlight the issues that underlie the sermons.

Part Three examines the results of the study. The larger issues and questions that underlie the Tish`ah be-'Av *pisqa'ot* , as well as the ideas and the motifs that permeate them, are examined and discussed.

In this study, I differentiate between symbol, motif, and thematic issue, and so my usage of each of these terms must be explained. An *issue*, as I use the term, is a question that underlies a large section of the midrash, occasioning stories and commentary, discussions, and citations of Scriptures in support of one argument or another. An issue does not necessarily come to a resolution at the end of a *pisqa*. More often than not, an issue will carry over into the next section or unit, until the argument is run out and its logical conclusion is reached. Such an issue is the question of God's justice. It is raised as early as *Pisqa* 26, and it is not resolved until *Pisqa* 35.

A *motif* is a recurring image, often related to the larger issue. Water, for example, is related to the question of God's justice. It may appear in the form of a flood, serving as a reminder of God's promise never again to annihilate all life, and to punish only the individual or individuals in question. Water, however, is also representative of God's power to redeem, give life, and provide sustenance.

A *symbol* is a word, phrase or image that is associated with the larger motif. "Dew" is, thus, a symbol which, related to water, may indicate God's blessing (providing nourishment) *or* God's punishment (indicating homelessness and the absence of protection from the elements).

"Eye" or "eyes" are a symbol representing the motif of seeing, which, in itself, is part of the much larger issue of outside appearances *versus* underlying realities.

The genius of the midrashist is clearest in those instances when two or more motifs are combined and become represented by a single symbol. This is exemplified by "earring," a symbol that is discussed in *Pisqa* 33. As a symbol, it belongs to the "ornament" motif; additionally, however, it is also related to the motif of hearing or hearkening to God's words. In *Pisqa* 33:10, all these motifs and symbols unite and, now symbolizing God's close relationship with Israel, answer the larger issue of whether the bond between Israel and God is still extant.

Part Four summarizes the thesis and its findings. In this section, the large issues that the author of *Pesiqta Rabbati* confronted and attempted to answer are discussed. Also, in this section, additional topics for study and research are suggested.

It is the hope of this writer that the results of this research might elucidate the Tish`ah be-'Av material in *Pesiqta Rabbati*, enabling the contemporary student of midrash to partake of the intense beauty, deeply felt emotions, and brilliant literary techniques with which its author imbued the work, and, above all, to be stirred by its inspirational message.

Part One: Overview of *Pesiqta Rabbati Pisqa'ot* 26-37

A. On the Practice of Scriptural Readings in Public from the Time of Ezra to the Talmud

The practice of reciting the Torah portion on Monday and Thursday mornings, and on the afternoon of the Sabbath, is ascribed by the Talmud to Ezra.[2] Whether historically correct or not, this tradition is based at least on a passage from Nehemiah 8, in which it is reported that Ezra, the Scribe, assembled the people on the first day of the seventh month (Rosh Ha-Shanah) and read to them from the book of the Law of Moses. Neh. 8:8 offers an account of the reading: "And they read from the book, the Law of God, clearly; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading."

In interpretation of this description, "enough has been said to show why we conjecture that this verse may record the use of both the *targum* [translation into the vernacular Aramaic] and the midrashic sermon."[3] Based on an analysis of Neh. 8:14-15, it is probable that the material read by Ezra was that pertaining to the celebration of the first day of the seventh month (Rosh Ha-Shanah), Lev. 23:25-27.

This public reading, then, seems to be the earliest example of reciting and explaining the related Torah passages on the date of a festival. However, aside from this obscure passage, "there is no evidence of a cycle of Scriptural readings linked with the calendar" during the time of the Second Temple.[4]

During the pre-70 C.E. period, there were no rigid rules for reading from

[2] T.Yer. *Megillah*, I,3, p. 70b; B.T. *Baba Qamma* 72a.
[3] Ben Zion Wacholder, *Prolegomenon* to *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue; a study in the cycles of the readings from the Torah and Prophets, as well as from Psalms, and in the structure of the Midrashic homilies*, by Jacob Mann and Isaiah Sonne (New York: Ktav, 1971), p. XIV.
[4] Idem, p. XVII.

the Prophets, and practices varied regionally in Israel. "Differing norms also prevailed in regard to the recitation from the Hagiographa. Stating an opinion against such practice, M. *Shabbat*, 16:1, says: 'Why are they not read? Because of the loss of time in the house of study."[5]

Cyclical systems linking the readings with the calendar began to emerge during Mishnaic times (c.70-220 C.E.), as evidenced in the discussions in Mishna *Ta`anit*, 4,3, and Mishna *Megillah* 4,4. M. *Megillah*, 3, 4-6, lists the selections to be read on a number of specific Sabbaths, including the fast days.

In the Talmudic Period (c. 220-550 C.E.), the Mishna became secondary only to the Torah as a source of Jewish law, and its decisions on the Torah readings became standard. Though divergence, at least in the early part of that period, still existed both within Israel and in Babylonia, by the end of the sixth century, two systems of reading the Torah, the "Triennial Cycle," most commonly associated with Israel, and the "Annual Cycle," the one more favored in Babylonia, were well established.[6]

Insofar as readings from the Prophets on regular Shabbatot were concerned, again, regional differences existed. However, "what ought to be stressed is the relative consensus of both the Babli and the Yerushalmi [Talmuds] in regard to the Prophetic selections for the Festivals and special Sabbaths."[7]

Though the *haftarot* were regarded as supplementary to the Torah readings, during Talmudic times, some selections clearly assumed special significance. Such was the case with the selections for the three Sabbaths before Tish`ah be-'Av— known as the Sabbaths of Mourning and Admonition—

[5] Wacholder, *Prolegomenon*, p. XX.
[6] Idem, p. XXI
[7] Idem, p. XXIV.

and the seven Sabbaths following the fast day—the Sabbaths of Consolation. The antiquity of these selections is attested to by the presence of homilies for them in the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* (ca. sixth century C.E.).

The *Ketubim* (Hagiographa or "The Writings," the third division of the Bible), assumed a greater role in the liturgical reading of Scriptures during this period, and one of the purposes of the *haggadists* (the "story tellers" or interpreters of Scriptures) was to integrate selections from the Hagiographa as well as from the Prophets into the Scriptural lessons.[8]

In the following centuries, as conditions in the Land of Israel ("Palestine") deteriorated, and along with the rise of the Islamic world, the Babylonian community assumed greater and greater authority over Jewish life and law (*Halakhah*). The Annual—or Babylonian—Cycle of reading the Torah became the system accepted throughout the Jewish world.[9] One of the key features of this system was that it was closely linked with the Jewish calendar.

The calendar became of great significance in maintaining the unity of Jewish communities wherever they existed in the Diaspora. Reflecting the reality and growing importance of the Diaspora community, the significance of the holidays evolved in such a way as to lessen the emphasis on the geographical/seasonal aspects of each holiday, and maximize the emphasis on its historical/national aspects. Thus, the significance of Tish`ah be-'Av changed from a day of mourning over the fall of Judaea and the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, to a day (actually a period of ten weeks!) of introspection and reflection on the state of Judaism and Jews. Aiding this transformation were

[8] See Jacob Mann and Isaiah Sonne, *The Bible as Read and Preached, Prolegomena*, p. 12.
[9] Even though the Annual Cycle was used in parts of Israel (see Wacholder, *Prolegomenon*, p. XXIII; see also Ezra Fleisher, "*Luah Mo`adei Ha-shanah Be-fiyyut le-Rabbi Eleazar Berrabi Killir,*" in *Tarbiz* 52 [1982-83], 6, p. 244), it became more and more associated with the Babylonian custom, particularly following the liturgical schism between the two communities that occurred during the Talmudic period.

midrash — collections of legend, lore and law used to explain the Scriptural readings—and the *piyyut* — liturgical poetry.

The midrash, by character and intent, was evolutionary. The midrashists were free to choose material, both from folk material and from Scripture; their interpretations, in turn, were used by later *haggadists* or midrashists. Thus, as midrashic collections developed, similar legends or stories often found their place in parallel locations, and were sometimes referred to in later collections as well. In such a system, "an identical legend served to express different ideas and changing purposes."[10] This factor was vital in the evolution of the holidays' character and function.

The growing importance of the holidays in Jewish life becomes apparent in light of the appearance of the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* and the Pesiqta *Rabbati.* The publication of such collections of rabbinic homilies or *midrashim* based on the Scriptural readings for the holidays and special Sabbaths suggests that they were filling a need in the community.

Also suggesting the evolving importance of the holidays is a *piyyut* ("*U-vekhein, Zekhor, Adonay, Meh Hayah Lanu*") by the seventh-century liturgical poet Eleazar Kallir.[11] Woven into this lengthy poem is a complete and detailed calendar of all the holidays and special Sabbaths. In a key phrase, the poet writes: "Restore the holiday's joy ["salvation"] as of yore, inasmuch as I am lost in foreign lands."[12] It is possible to understand this line as a rationale for the inclusion of the list of holidays: Their purpose, the poet seems to imply, is to bring the lost back into the fold through the celebration of the festival.

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[10] J. Heinemann, *Aggadot ve-Toldoteihen: `Iyyunim be-Hishtalshelutan shel Mesorot* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), p. 2.
[11] Printed in Ezra Fleisher, "*Luah mo'adei ha-shanah*," pp. 223-272.
[12] Idem, p. 232, translation by BH.

B. On the Nature of Midrash *Pesiqta Rabbati*

The process by which narrative *haggadot* —Rabbinic lore used to explain or enlarge upon Scriptural readings—became midrashic collections, is beyond the scope of this thesis.[13] In any case, it was an oral process, one which allowed alteration by accident or purpose, and variation in style and content. Even the appearance in writing of a midrashic collection such as *Pesiqta Rabbati* did not preclude its further alteration. Thus, the text of the *Rabbati* is extant in several manuscripts, fragments and editions.[14] These show extensive editing and redaction that suggest an evolutionary process that began with "a kind of 'blue-print' containing sketches of sermons and sermon material... [that] subsequently solidified into definitive units."[15]

"The core material of *Pesiqta Rabbati* probably dates from the fifth or sixth century Palestine."[16] However, any attempt at dating it more precisely is probably misdirected, since "the text grew by accretion whereby units of text were interwoven into the preexisting... material."[17] Some of this material refers back to Hillel and Shammai (first century B.C.E.) and Rabbi Yohanan ben Zakkai (first century C.E.). "Most of the rabbis cited in the text can be dated to the third and fourth century C.E."[18]

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[13] For further study of this topic, see J. Heinemann, *Derashot ba-Tzibbur bi-Tekufat ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1970); also see J. Heinemann, *'Aggadot*, pp. 7-47.
[14] For further study of these, see Norman J. Cohen, *The Manuscripts and Editions of the Midrash Pesikta Rabbati: A Prolegomenon to a Scientific Edition*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, New York,1977); Norman J. Cohen, "The London Manuscript of Midrash Pesiqta Rabbati: A Key-Witness Comes to Light," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, N.S. 73 (1982/83), pp. 209-237; Rivka Ulmer, *Pesiqta Rabbati: A Synoptic Edition of Pesiqta Rabbati Based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps*, vol. 1 (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1997), *Introduction*, pp. xxviii-xxxviii.
[15] Rivka Ulmer, *A Synoptic Edition*, p. xxvi.
[16] Idem, p. xv.
[17] Idem, p. xvi.
[18] Idem, p. xxiv.

Pesiqta Rabbati was known to Rashi (1040-1105), who mentions it by name.[19] The manuscript known as the Parma MS was copied in 1270. Another manuscript, the Casanata (or Casanatense) MS is of disputed date, ranging from the fourteenth century to the sixteenth/seventeenth century.[20] A rediscovered manuscript (Dropsie MS 26) is similar to the Casanata MS; according to its colophon, it was finished in 1531.[21] The first printed edition of the *Rabbati* was printed in Prague in 1653 or 1656 and has served as the textual basis for subsequent printed editions—the Sklow (1806), Breslau (1831, based on Sklow as well as on another, no-longer-extant text), and Lemberg (1853, based on Sklow and Breslau).

The two printed editions most commonly used today are the Friedmann edition (Vienna, 1880), and the Warsaw edition (1893). The English edition used in preparing this thesis is the translation by William G. Braude.[22]

C. The Homilies for Tish`a be-'Av in *Pesiqta Rabbati*

The title of the work, *Pesiqta Rabbati*, refers to its form and—in all likelihood—its purpose. Related to the Hebrew *pasuk* ("sentence" or "verse"), *pisqa* refers to an individual unit or chapter. As such, each *pisqa* (plural: *pisqa'ot*) is an independent homily or sermon consisting of a *petiḥta* ("opening" or introduction), *gufa* ("body" of the sermon, consisting of several stories and commentaries) and *neḥemta* (the obligatory consolation).[23] Like its earlier

[19] Rashi on Is. 51:14.

[20] See Ulmer, *Synoptic Edition*, p. xxx, n. 152.

[21] See Norman J. Cohen, "The London Manuscript of Midrash Pesiqta Rabbati: A Key-Witness Comes to Light," *Jewish Quarterly Review*, N.S. 73 (1982/83), pp. 209-237.

[22] William G. Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), subsequently referred to as "Braude." All English citations from *Pesiqta Rabbati* appearing in this thesis are from the Braude edition.

[23] Of *pisqa'ot* 26-37, only 29, 29/30 and 29/30A in the Friedmann edition do not end with a consolation promising Israel's redemption in the time-to-come, possibly indicating that, originally, the *pisqa'ot* did not end there.

sibling, *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana*, the *Rabbati* is a collection of sermons based on the Scriptural readings for the holidays and special Shabbatot. The term *rabbati* denotes "greater" and serves to differentiate this collection from the the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana.* Additionally, in Ulmer's opinion, the title *Rabbati* "could also mean that a significant objective of the collection of these homilies was to achieve a 'complete' coverage of an existing Jewish liturgical calendar in respect to the festivals and special Sabbaths."[24]

Among the homilies in this collection are *Pisqa'ot* 26-37, which represent sermons for the three Sabbaths of Mourning and Admonition, a sermon upon the *haftarah* reading for Tish`ah be-'Av, a sermon on the psalm reading for Tish`ah be-'Av, and sermons for the subsequent seven Sabbaths of Consolation.

Several sources can be discerned for the sermons found in the *Rabbati.*[25] The Tish`ah be-'Av *pisqa'ot* can be demonstrated by their stylistic traits (such as opening formula, similarities to other midrashim) to have been drawn from five of these sources. These are:

1) *Yelammedenu* material (sermons whose opening *petiḥta* begins with an *halakhic* question and answer): *Pisqa'ot* 31, 33.

2) Sermons similar in form and content to material found in *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* : *Pisqa* 32.

3) Sermons similar to material found in *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* but displaying variances in form and content: *Pisqa'ot* 27, 27/28, 29/30.

4) *Ruaḥ Ha-Qodesh* sermons (sermons whose opening *petiḥta* begins with the opening formula, "This verse is to be understood in light of what So-and-so was inspired by the Holy Spirit to say..."): *Pisqa'ot* 28, 30, 34-37.

[24] Ulmer, *Synoptic Edition*, p. xviii.
[25] Ibid., p. xxvi.

5) The narrative homily: *Pisqa* 26.[26]

Yet, despite the many different sources, the Tish`ah be-'Av *pisqa'ot* form a unit all their own. This unit has a nearly symmetrical structure, consisting of three groups. *Pisqa'ot* 26-29/30 examine and shed light on the historical events that led up to the fall of Jerusalem, on the destruction itself, and on the experiences of the exiles on route to, and by the rivers of, Babylon. *Pisqa'ot* 29/30A–33 concentrate on the relationship between Israel and God. They contain difficult questions regarding the possibly excessive nature of God's wrath and punishment; they examine Israel's own behavior, both prior to the destruction and afterwards; and they discuss the nature of God's consolation—whether it will be direct or through an intermediary. Finally, *Pisqa'ot* 34-37 offer a brilliant and climactic depiction of the coming of the Messiah and of Redemption in the time-to-come.

The flow of the story line can be perceived in something of an outline form in *Pisqa* 29/30A, the first homily of consolation. Comparing the two verses, "Speak ye comfortably to the heart of Jerusalem" (Is. 40:2) and "I spoke with my own heart" (Eccles. 1:16), the midrashist seems to be struck by the fact that a single organ within the body could both speak and hear. Expounding on this extraordinary ability, the midrashist finds scriptural references that show that the heart can do other things as well: "According to Scripture, the heart can see, the heart can speak, the heart can know, the heart can hear, the heart can stand, the heart can fall, the heart can walk, the heart can cry out, the heart can be glad, and the heart can be comforted."[27]

These ten qualities, at first reading, seem to describe the maturation process of a child. But when seen as motifs, they outline the whole unit of

[26] Much has been written about this unique *pisqa*. See, for example, Ulmer, n. 122.
[27] Braude, p. 573.

Tish`a be-'Av *pisqa'ot:* In this light, *Pisqa* 26 is about birth and formation (creation), about seeing, and about speaking (prophecy). The theme of *Pisqa* 27 is hearkening and the consequences of disobeying God. *Pisqa'ot* 27-8 speak of standing—Zedekiah as king—and falling—"He cast down from heaven unto earth the glorious image of Israel" (Lam. 2:1). *Pisqa'ot* 28, 29, and 29/30 focus on walking—exile—and crying out. Gladness and comforting (redemption) inform the remainder of the *pisqa'ot* .

Along with these major themes, other ideas and motifs appear throughout the *pisqa'ot*, serving to unify the individual units into a collective whole.

This thesis attempts to analyze this collection of homilies in light of these motifs and ideas, with the hope that such analysis will shed light on the extent of redaction that these *midrashim* underwent. It is the author's hope that this study will serve to reinforce the purpose of the midrashist, while also deepening the reader's understanding of the meaning and purpose of the *pisqa'ot* of Tish`ah be-'Av.

Part Two: Analysis and Interpretation of *Pisqa'ot* 26-37

Pisqa 26—First Sabbath of Admonition

Va-yehi Ba-`et She-sareha —"When the Sheep Rebelled" (Jer. 1)[28]

This *pisqa* is unique in its beauty, in its depth of feeling, in the visual – almost cinematic – way it describes historical events, and in the masterful way in which it interweaves these events with its message. It is also unique in that of all *pisqa'ot* in *Pesiqta Rabbati, Pisqa* 26 alone does not begin with a quote from the *haftarah* on which it is based. Its pericope text, according to Friedmann,[29] is a parable based on Ezek. 34:31:

> "And it came to pass
> That the sheep rebelled,
> And would not hearken
> To <their> masters' words,
> For they hated their shepherds
> Who were their good leaders,
> And withdrew far from them."

Ezek. 34 actually concerns itself with God's displeasure with Israel's leaders. The proverb functions in shifting the blame from the shepherds to the flock itself. As the blame shifts, so must repentance; it will be up to the Israelites, not their leaders, to achieve *teshuvah* – returning to God. Still, sheep do not rebel or roam aimlessly unless abandoned by their shepherd, and, therefore, it will be the task of the midrashist to replace the shepherd and to redefine the relationship between the flock and its leader in the hope that the people will follow.

The dominant theme of *Pisqa* 26 is the reconciliation and reconstitution of the dysfunctional family–symbolic of the relationship between God and Israel.

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[28] Cf. *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, Buber Edition (subsequently referred to as PRK): *Pisqa* 13, *Divrei Yirmiyahu* – "The Words of Jeremiah."

[29] See Meir Friedmann (Ish Shalom), *Midrash Pesikta Rabbati* (Vienna, 1880, reprinted in Israel), (subsequently referred to as "Friedmann"), *Pisqa* 26, n. א.

Jeremiah's birth and precocity symbolize the unsteady nature of the family's situation. Jeremiah, when still a new-born, speaks "as though he were already a full-grown youth." Echoing the tradition that his mother was a prostitute,[30] Jeremiah questions his very conception and birth: "You did not conceive me in the manner of other women... you did not loose me... in the manner of other women who give birth." He accuses his mother of being unfaithful and of being too proud to follow due process to correct her behavior: "Why do you not drink the water of bitterness? Or do you mean to brazen out your guilt?"

But even as Jeremiah questions his parentage, God steps in, as it were, to fill the role of the absent father, saying to Jeremiah, "Before I formed thee in the belly, that is, before I formed thee in the belly of thy mother." The implication is that yet yet prior to his conception, Jeremiah's mission–and by extension, Israel's– was predetermined. God now sends Jeremiah to warn Israel that, unless the nation repents, it is doomed (Jer. 1:11-12). The immutability of the warning is underscored by the use of the word *shoqed*, which is related to *shaqed*, the almond tree, representing God's constancy as well as the motif of the orchard/vineyard, which is found throughout *Pisqa'ot* 26-37.

Jeremiah rebels against his mission, claiming that–his extraordinary speaking ability notwithstanding–he is yet a child and is therefore unqualified to speak before the whole congregation of Israel.[31] Acknowledging His own relationship to Israel, God replies, "When I think of the congregation of Israel with love, I think of it as a child." Thus placed on equal footing with the people, Jeremiah becomes the middleman between God and Israel.

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[30] Some claim that she was Rahab. Cf. PRK, *Pisqa* 13.

[31] Cf. Ex. 4:10. The ironic comparison to Moses sets up a tension: Moses is to lead Israel to freedom, while Jeremiah must lead it into exile.

Jeremiah's frustration is keen. Against all natural instinct, he not only must confront and accuse his nation (in the person of his mother), he also cannot question God's justice. The midrashist , however, with a view to the horrors of Jerusalem's destruction, harbors such questions. Unable to give expression to his own misgivings, he, therefore, quotes Job, who does question Divine justice, speaking the words Jeremiah cannot.[32]

Having raised the question of God's justice, the *pisqa* proceeds to examine the aspect of Israel's behavior that led to God's angry response – disloyalty, comparing and contrasting three master-servant relationships.

Zedekiah, who fancies himself a loyal servant of God (believing righteousness will come forth through him), is made to take an oath of loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar over a Scroll of the Torah that is placed on his knees. Disloyal to God as well as the Babylonian king, Zedekiah will turn from puppet ruler to actual slave of the Babylonians. Jeremiah, God's true servant, is accused by false prophets of disloyalty to Zedekiah and is cast into a pit.[33] The loyal servant, Ebed-Melech, the Cushite, rescues Jeremiah, securing his future role as "father" or leader of the people.

The motif of outside appearance and underlying reality, a motif that occurs frequently in the *pisqa'ot*, can be seen at work throughout these examples. Who is the true master and who the servant? Even Nebuchadnezzar, teaches the *midrash*, has a Master: Above all else, God controls history as well as individual lives. The same motif is also clear in the case of Ebed-Melech, beginning with his name (combining "slave" with "king"). "And why was he called 'Cushite?' Even as a Cushite stands out because of

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[32] Cf. *Pisqa* 47:3.

[33] Cf. Gen. 37:24, in which Joseph's fall and imprisonment prove to be the inauspicious first steps toward becoming Israel's savior.

[the color of] his skin, so in the palaces of Zedekiah, Ebed-Melech stood out because of his good deeds." Moreover, whereas the color white usually indicates purity, here the color scheme is exactly the opposite.[34]

In contrast to the vicissitudes of the "real" world, God's plan shows no variance—His law and word are constant, as shown by the predestination of the dates of destruction. On the other hand, this leaves open the questions regarding the severity and extent of God's punishment: Does God's plan also includes its own reversal, the rebuilding of Israel?

The narrative of destruction continues: The women of Jerusalem walk the streets as prostitutes. As the famine worsens, mothers, instead of sustaining their children, eat their flesh. Children, instead of sucking milk, die on their mothers' bosoms, fulfilling the text, "When their life is poured out into their mother's bosom."[35] Confusion of appearance and reality makes it seem as though the father-figure, too, has abandoned his house: "The Master of the House is no longer within... Let them enter the vineyard and cut down the vines, for the Watchman has gone away and left it."

Reinforcing the idea of apparent abandonment, Jeremiah is told by God to leave Jerusalem. However, there is another purpose to his mission: Buying the field in Anatoth,[36] an action that contains the answer to the question of Israel's future redemption.[37]

That Jerusalem's destruction is God's doing—and therefore part of a larger plan—is illustrated by the story of the angel who came down and, "Setting his feet against the walls of Jerusalem, breached them.... Then the

[34] Cf. Lam. 4:7-8, Dan. 11:35 and 12:10, Ps. 51:9, and Is. 1:18.
[35] Lam. 2:12.
[36] Cf. Gen. 23, which relates Abraham's purchase of the Cave of Machpelah and the field surrounding it.
[37] Cf. Jer. 1:10, where Jeremiah's mission is not only to rule and warn of destruction, but also "to build and to plant."

angel cried out... 'A conquered city ye have conquered, a dead people ye have killed.'" [38]

Just as the rebelling sheep of the pericope hold the key to their own redemption, so the future behavior of Israel will counteract the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. The burning Temple provides the setting for Israel's repentance; the ensuing actions of the High Priest are the key–literally and figuratively–for Israel's redemption.

Taking the keys of the Temple and crying, "I have been an untrue custodian," The High Priest tosses the keys upward to heaven (ceding control to God). Slaughtered by the Babylonians "at the altar, in the very place where he used to offer the daily sacrifice," the one who previously had offered sacrifice now becomes the offering himself. This penitential act leads to the next, as the High Priest's daughter is slaughtered next to her father, her blood mingling with his. With her dying breath, she reestablishes the daughter-father relationship: "Woe unto me! My father, the delight of my eyes!"

Others follow this example, in a communal act of *auto-da-fé:*

> When the priests and the Levites saw that the Temple was on fire, they took their harps and trumpets and let themselves fall with them into the flames and were consumed.[39] When the virgins who wove the curtain for the Sanctuary saw that the Temple was on fire, they let themselves fall into the flames, so that the enemies should not violate them, and were consumed.[40]

The fire turns from a symbol of destruction to a purifying, holy vehicle, one which actually serves to protect Israel from violation.

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[38] Cf. P. 30:3, where it is intimated that Bar Kochba was slain by his own people, not by the Romans.

[39] Cf. Mid. Tanhuma (*Ha-nidpas*)*Va-yehi* :2: "When Moses's time to die had come, the Holy One, Blessed be He, hid the trumpets Moses had constructed in the desert, so that no one else might use them to convene the people."

[40] William G. Braude, *Pesikta Rabbati: Discourses for Feasts, Fasts, and Special Sabbaths,* 2 vols. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1968), (subsequently referred to as "Braude"), Vol. 2, p. 535.

Zedekiah, however, does not follow the example of the priests and attempts to flee Jerusalem through the underground passages carved to ferry water into the city during a siege. He and his ten sons are seized. Nebuchadnezzar judges Zedekiah, ironically (but consistently with his role as God's servant), in accordance with God's laws, sentencing Zedekiah and his sons to death. The sons, displaying filial loyalty, beg not to see their father killed; their request is honored by Nebuchadnezzar, who has them killed first. Zedekiah is punished by having his eyes gouged out. Through this final irony, though blinded, he finally "sees" the truth of Jeremiah's prophecies, and he exhorts all "children of men" to see the truth behind appearances.

Returning from Anatoth and seeing Jerusalem's destruction, Jeremiah at first joins the exiles. However, he soon realizes he can provide more comfort to those who remained in the Land of Israel, and he leaves the exiles. At his departure, "all of them broke out weeping with loud lamentation and cried out, saying: 'Our father Jeremiah, in truth, will you abandon us?'" Exile and destruction seem to have accomplished their purpose in reconciling children with their parents.

On his way to Jerusalem, Jeremiah sees a weeping woman sitting on top of a mountain, mourning for her husband who is presumably lost at sea, and for her seven children, killed as their house fell upon them.[41] In need of comforting himself, Jeremiah fails to recognize the woman, who turns out to be Mother Zion. Accepting the woman's reproof, Jeremiah comforts her by comparing her affliction–and the certainty of her redemption–to that of Job. The

[41] This passage recalls the tribulations of Job. However, whereas Job protests against the measure and meaning of God's justice, Jeremiah is silent. It is his failure to express his misgivings about the severity of God's punishment, his lack of compassion, that is possibly behind his failure to recognize—to see behind appearances—who the woman really is.

nehemta (the concluding section of the *pisqa*, offering consolation) promises that, "The ransomed ones of the Lord" (Is. 35:10) will surely return to Zion in song.[42]

[42] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:5.

Pisqa 27—Second Sabbath of Admonition

Shime`u — "Hear ye the word of the Lord" (Jer. 2:4-28; 3:4)

The key to Israel's survival as a people is hearkening to God's word. *Pisqa* 27 offers four types of relationships as context for this act: Israel can hearken from a position of lifelong prosperity–blessed by God–or it can do so as though dead–punished by God. The relationship between God and Israel can be that of master and slave, parent and child, or teacher and disciple.

The reward of obeying God's words is a fulfilled life and abundant crops. Israel's physical existence in its land is defined by two years of extraordinarily bountiful crop–once during the year before the people came into the Promised Land, the other during the year following its banishment from that land.[43] This unmatched abundance stands in stark contrast to the famine in Jerusalem at the time of the Destruction (and from the economic as well as moral poverty described in *Pisqa* 32).[44]

The punishment for disobeying God is spelled out through a verse from Job: "But if they hearken not, they shall perish by the sword [*Shelah*]" (Job 36:12). This harsh decree, however, is softened by the midrashist's allusion to Jer. 15:1, where *Shelah* means "cast them out."[45] The juxtaposition of the two possible punishments indicated by *Shelah* raises the question whether exile is equivalent to national death. Underlying this is an important rabbinic concern: Is Jewish life possible in the Diaspora?

Pisqa 27 refers the reader to Ezek. 37, where the Vision of the Dry Bones is explained in light of Eccles. 4:2 ("I declare that the dead who are already

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[43] These two end-pieces could be interpreted as metaphors for Creation and Redemption.
[44] See Braude, *Pisqa* 32:2.
[45] Cf. Ex. 5:1 and Moses' demand of Pharaoh. The ironic connection between Moses' mission and that of Jeremiah, first seen in *Pisqa* 26 (see n. 3 above), is reinforced.

dead are better off than the living who are yet alive").[46] In this context, the answer to the question of the possibility of Jewish life in the Diaspora begins to emerge: In exile, the people are *as though* they were dead.[47] Questioned by God, "Can these bones live?" Ezekiel responds, "O Lord God, Thou knowest." His answer is interpreted as a lack of belief in God's power, for which Ezekiel is said to be punished by having his bones "buried in an unclean land."[48] The relationship between God, Israel, and the Land of Israel exists as long as they believe in God's power; even though they are "buried in Babylon and have been reduced to dry bones," they can be revived and restored to their previous state of grace.

Israel is given the choice to listen to God's words as a child who hearkens to his father's words, or else as a slave to his master's (a condition which implies returning to pre-redemption status). Best of all, "It is well to hear the rebuke of the Wise" (Eccles. 7:5), through which Israel is urged to listen and learn as a mature disciple. The "teaching" that Israel is urged to learn absorb is, of course, the Torah, specifically the Ten Commandments, and the "wise," by extension, is Moses.[49]

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[46] Cf. PRK 14:29-30 (..."Listen as living bodies before you have to listen as bones, the Dry Bones").

[47] See Braude, *pisqa* 27 n. 8 (pp. 541-42).

[48] The inherent criticism implied by Ezekiel's words to the dry bones reflects Rabbinic lore that these are the bones of the tribe of Ephraim, which was not content to await redemption by God and effected their own Exodus from Egypt. In one aspect of this lore, the premature exodus, resulting in the Ephraimites' slaughter by the Philistines, is shown to be undesirable behavior that merits the rabbis' warning. Nevertheless, there is also a certain amount of praise for the Ephraimites' zealous longing for redemption, which was so great it overpowered their better judgment. See J. Heinemann, *'Aggadot ve-Toldoteihen: `Iyyunim be-Hishtalshelutan shel Mesorot,* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974), p. 139.

[49] *`Aseret Ha-dibberot*—"the ten statements" or "words" (from *d.b.r*, "to speak" or "to say") — appear as a motif in *piyyutim* written for the Ninth of Av by Eleazar Kallir. See Ezra Fleischer, "*Luah Mo'adei Ha-Shanah Befiyut Le-Rabbi 'Elazar Berabbi Killir,*" *Tarbiz* 52 (1982-3), pp. 223-72; and, *idem*, "*Kompozitsyot Killiriyot Le'Tish'a Be'Av,*" *HUCA* 45 (1974): Hebrew section, pp. א–מ.

In its discussion of Israel's failure to obey the Ten Commandments, the *pisqa* teaches that of the ten, the most important is keeping the Sabbath, the one commandment that concentrates on the positive aspect of the Israel–God relationship, a relationship that is crucial to the survival of the Jewish people.

Pisqa 27/28—Third Sabbath of Admonition

Va-yimelokh — "When Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned as king" (Jer. 37)

This *piska* sets up a series of contrasts in whose light the destruction of Jerusalem becomes inevitable. The first of these is in the very choice of *Haftarah* reading: The reading for the previous Shabbat concerned itself with hearkening. Flowing from it, the theme of the reading for this, the Third Sabbath of Admonition is *not* hearkening: "Neither [Zedekiah], nor his servants, nor the people of the Land did hearken unto the words of the Lord" (Jer. 37:2).

In his behavior and self-perception, Jeremiah is contrasted with the young men and women of Jerusalem. Whereas he sees himself as yet a child, they are physically mature, having become "as well-fed horses, lusty stallions" (Jer. 5:8). He is humble, they are proud. Jeremiah's birth, described by the *Midrash* as creation by God (and connected to his mission by way of a word play on *tsir*, *tsur*, and *tsara* —respectively, "labor pains," "rock," and "hardship"), is contrasted with the sexual promiscuity and rebelliousness of Israel.[50] He wails and moans; they "neigh," clap their hands and "tinkle the ornaments upon their feet."

The merits of the Patriarchs is contrasted with the failings of their descendants. Whereas the piety and righteousness of the fathers in earlier times were imitated by those of their sons, at the time immediately preceding Jerusalem's destruction, both children and parents worship lifeless idols.

All of Israel's pre-earned merits have been used up. Though this might spell out permanent doom for Israel, the idea that actually is reinforced is that

[50] This in itself stands in contrast to the people's perception of Jeremiah's birth (see *Pisqa* 26).

the potential for redemption is in the hands of the people, through their present behavior. However, one by one, every symbol of Israel's faith and loyalty to God is emptied of its contents. God retaliates by casting down every symbol of His protection of Israel.

Jerusalem, once set as the jewel in the crown of creation, is about to be cast down to earth as well.

The cosmic range of the destruction is illustrated by the image of a lion. In the month of Av, represented in the zodiac by a lion,

> God, of whom it is written, 'The Lion hath roared, who will not fear?' (Amos 3:8), is said to have sent Nebuchadnezzar, called lion in the verse, 'A lion is gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations' (Jer. 4:7), to destroy the Temple which is described as 'the lion of God' (Is. 29:1), and to smite Israel, also termed lion (Num. 23:24).

Zion finally recognizes the magnitude and inevitability of its fall and cries out: "The Lord hath forsaken me, and the Lord hath forgotten me" (Is. 49:14). This cry sets up the *nehemta*, which is a prayer for the rebuilding of the cities of Judah and the ingathering of the children of Israel. The implied teaching of the *pisqa* is that—hopefully—God will respond to Israel's lamentation, repentance and prayer, and that His relationship with Israel will be restored.

Pisqa 28—Ninth of Av

'Al Naharot Bavel — "Weeping by the Rivers of Babylon" (Ps. 137)

The parallel between Israel's actions and fate and those of God is developed further in this *piska*. The *petihta* text, "My tent is spoiled, and all my cords are broken" (Jer. 10:20) is treated in light of this parallel.

Though the "tent" outwardly represents God's realm—the heavenly abode as well as the earthly Temple, on another level it is symbolic of God's law. Underlying this phrase, is the unspoken questioning of God's justice: Is it truly immutable, or is it merely a concept emptied of its meaning?[51] The "cords" are interpreted as the Sanhedrin, the Rabbinical court whose function it was to apply and interpret God's laws to Israel. The Sanhedrin's duty is explained as "fixing the dates of the festivals... intercalating months into years and days into months."[52] With the destruction of the tent and its cords, then, it becomes impossible for Israel "to observe the festivals in the proper manner, in the manner enjoined upon them at Sinai."

Appearances, however, must not be confused with underlying reality.[53] Exile, as was shown in *Pisqa* 27, is not equivalent to death, and *shudad,* whether translated as "spoiled" or "ravaged," does not mean utterly destroyed. Shamed and downcast, Israel shows its "submission to God's decree [and declares]: It would be a profanation to think that the Holy One, blessed be He, executes judgment without justice." As a sign of its submission to God, Israel takes an additional burden upon itself, the "observance of a festival for two

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[51] The verb that Braude translates as "spoiled" (*shudad*) can also be interpreted as "robbed" or "ravaged."

[52] In effect, with the Sanhedrin dispersed, the continuation of the work of the Sanhedrin becomes the purpose and function of *Pesiqta Rabbati.*

[53] The lesson of *Pisqa'ot* 26 and 27.

days" instead of one. With due humility, Israel admits that even so, it does "not meet fully all the obligations attendant upon the festival."

Israel's recognition of the limits of its powers is equivalent to the gesture of the High Priest in throwing the keys of the Temple up to heaven.[54] Recognition of God's exclusive power to rebuild and revivify Israel is precisely the attitude and posture that God had been waiting for. God can now promise that, whereas the first Temple "fell at the hand of the enemy..., the Latter Temple which the Holy One, blessed be He, will build... will never be destroyed."

The body of the *piska* is a commentary on the psalm read on Tish`ah be-'Av, Ps. 137: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept." It was not until they reached the Euphrates, the *midrash* explains, that the Israelites could sit and rest. Even then, however, their sorrows continued, as many died having drunk from the water of the river. The analogy to Egypt—without a Moses—continues.[55] Once again, Israel is enslaved on the shores of a death-bearing river, where they "labor and have no rest." The plaint, "Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the heaven" (Lam. 4:19) brings to mind Moses' speech: "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto Myself" (Ex. 19:4).

The depth of misery and shame in which Israel finds itself is augmented by the sight of "all the kings of Judah, who had been put into iron chains [and who] were walking naked along the edge of the river."[56] Nebuchadnezzar, on board a ship on the river,[57] orders his servants to place burdens "on the shoulders of the kings of Judah until their heads were bowed down because of

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[54] *Piska* 26:6

[55] Cf. my analysis of *Pisqa* 27 above, particularly n. 2.

[56] The text seems to imply that all Judah's history is being paraded and mocked, not merely their king, Zedekiah.

[57] An ironic contrast to the infant Moses in his ark.

the burden's weights." The Babylonian captors seem to hope that Israel would blaspheme and question God's justice. However, they are unsuccessful, as it is precisely at this point–again paralleling Egypt–that the cry of Israel reaches heaven.

Hearing this cry, God is so perturbed that He wishes to return the world to chaos. He is stopped, however, by angels who convince God not to destroy His heavenly abode.[58] In lieu of Moses, the angels and God Himself then lift the burdens from the kings of Judah. As though to prove to God that there still *are* some just people on the earth, the people of Beri clothe the naked kings of Judah and, consequently, are granted a blessing from God.[59]

Israel's repentance becomes more active: "As soon as they were exiled... they began according reverence to the commandments." By refusing to sing for the Babylonians of the songs of Zion (a reference to liturgical music intended solely for the Temple), the exiles begin their atonement. As punishment, the Babylonians "rose up in slaughter of the children of Israel and heaped multitudes upon multitudes. Though many of them were slain, nevertheless there was gladness among the children of Israel, because they had not sung before an alien god."[60]

In its *nehemta*, the *pisqa* returns to the motif of the parallels between God's actions and those of Israel. Israel's refusal to sing of the songs of Zion impels God to take an oath: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let My right hand forget her cunning. Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth if I remember not Jerusalem" (Ps. 137:5-6). The possibility of redemption, first turned into a promise, now has become an unbreakable oath.

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[58] Cf. Ex. 32:11-14.

[59] This is a parallel to Abraham's pursuit of justice in Gen. 18:25.

[60] Cf. *Pisqa* 26, where *Qiddush Ha-Shem*, suffering martyrdom rather than blaspheming God, is presented as a form of penance.

Pisqa 29—Ninth of Av

Bakho tivkeh ba-llayla — "Weeping, she weeps in the night" (Lam. 1:2)

The *petiḥta* reinforces the deep sense of mourning inspired by the pericope. The use of the grammatical structure of the infinitive absolute, "*bakho tivkeh* ," underscores the depth as well as the extent of the night in which Israel finds itself.[61] It might be easy for Israel to become despondent, and the *petiḥta* therefore offers consolation by suggesting that God, bound by the oath He had taken ("If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let My right hand forget her cunning"), is weeping too. "As it is below in My abode, so is it in My presence above—in both there is weeping over that which came to be.... My abode weeps because I took away the glory of My repose in her and left her." Yet, despite this assurance, tension exists between this explanation and God's explicit statement about the Temple: "This is "My resting place for ever" (Ps. 132:14).

A paradox also appears in the *halakhic* question with which the *petiḥta* opens: "Is it permissible for priests on the Ninth of Ab to take the bath that makes them ritually fit for the eating of heave offering?" Since Tish`ah be-'Av commemorates the destruction of the Temple, and since all sacrifice, including the heave offering, ceased thereafter, the question is actually moot.

The issue can only be understood allegorically. The Temple had served to purify the people; the ritual bath symbolized this process. With the Temple gone, the process of purification is no longer available, and the connection between God and Israel seems to be severed.

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[61] The doubling of the verb that is characteristic of this form also sets up the possibility of the "double consolation" (cf. *Piska* 29/30 A).

The *halakhic* decision by Rabbi Hanina, the Deputy High Priest, is cited: "The House of our God is worthy enough...[62] to give up a bath for its sake."[63] The effect of this citation is transformative: Abstention from *tevilah*—the ritual bath—as a sign of mourning for the Temple becomes the necessary component that, in post-Temple time, confirms the union between God and Israel.

The connection between the ritual bath and mourning—water and tears—is attributed to Rabbi Tanhuma.[64] Through his discourse, consolation begins to emerge: Israel weeps through the night (symbolizing darkness and hopelessness); God weeps through night and day (light appearing), as proven by the verses, "Let mine eyes run down with tears day and night" (Jer. 14:17) and "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night" (Jer. 8:23). This constant weeping by God is possible because, "Behold, He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4).

The assurance of God's constancy as Israel's keeper is welcome relief. Nevertheless, the tears are still of sadness, not of joy, and the body of the *pisqa* offers even more reason for mourning in its continuing description of the famine and its consequences in Israel. Mothers show no compassion for their children; moreover, the reader is told that even fathers participated in the horrors of eating "the flesh of their sons and daughters."[65]

The subtle criticism of the harshness of God's justice continues, albeit indirectly, transferred to God's messengers, the prophets Elisha and Jeremiah.

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[62] Braude's addition "for a priest" at this point (p. 561) may lead to confusion.
[63] B.T. *Ta'anit* 13a.
[64] Cf. Genesis Rabbah 2:5, which makes this connection possible: "Repentance... is likened to water, as it is written, *Pour out thy heart like water* (Lam. 2:19)." See also the parallel in Midrash *'Eikha Rabbati* 3:35: "Prayer is likened to a *miqveh*, and repentance to the sea."
[65] The absent father motif is thus changed and now includes a subtle reproach of God for the extent of the horrors visited on Israel.

Elisha is blamed by the king of Israel "for refusing to invoke God's mercy for the raising of the siege."[66] Jeremiah, whose early decision to accompany the exiles and bear their burdens with them provided moral if not physical comfort, proceeds to depart from them—reinforcing the absent-father motif—thus occasioning the exiles' double weeping, once for themselves, the other for Jeremiah's departure.[67]

[66] Braude, p. 564.

[67] The ambivalence of the midrash towards Jeremiah as comforter is evident through other examples: At the end of *Pisqa* 26, he at first fails to comfort Mother Zion. The Scroll of Lamentations, attributed to Jeremiah, is rife with Israel's claims that it has no one to comfort her (e.g. 1:2, 3, 9, 16, 17, 21; 2:13). Lam. 5:8 speaks of a rescuer in terms of someone who eases the burden (*poreq*): Because of his special status, Jeremiah has the option of burdening or unburdening himself of the yoke. Unable to do so for Israel, he chooses to unburden himself only. That is possibly the reason Isaiah is chosen for the role of comforter.

Pisqa 29/30—Ninth of Av

'Eikha yashva badad — How doth the city sit solitary" (Lam. 1:1)

Using motifs introduced in earlier *pisqa'ot*, *Pisqa* 29/30 functions as a conclusion to the Mourning *pisqa'ot.*

The *pisqa* consists of two parts, each of which begins with a parable of a father and his son. In the first story, an Israelite is asked why he is unwilling to sacrifice one of his sons to an idol.[68] The presumable nobility of his refusal turns out to be failure as the Israelite responds that, with his sons already fully-grown, he has no control over them.[69] Moreover, he soon remembers he has yet another son, one still young enough to obey his father. The child is at school, presumably learning Torah, which, though of great value to Israel, gives the father "neither profit nor pleasure." The father then offers this child to the idol—an act that is symbolic of Israel's rejection of the Torah and its subsequent replacement with material goods that are of no real value.

In choosing to worship an idol, the Israelite sacrifices his eternity. God, however, asks for sacrifices that are not such a heavy burden—"only a handful, as is said, 'And he shall take thereout his handful... with all the frankincense thereof' (Lev. 2:2)."

Israel's actions in its land has consequences in the heavens. In response to Israel's choice, God is forced to choose a wicked man – Nebuchadnezzar–as His servant. The burden that Israel had imposed upon itself also has its divine parallel: "Because of your sins you made Me assume the burden of exile in Babylon." Mixed with the guilt, however, there is some

[68] The parallel in *'Eikah Rabbati* 1:38 adds the information that, of the other, already -grown children, "One works with gold, another with silver, a third with sheep, and a fourth with the herds." The precious metals, the sheep and the herd are important motifs in the Tish`ah Be- 'Av

[69] The Israelite's answer implies that his inability to give direction to his sons is matched by their inadequate sense of responsibility towards their father.

consolation in the knowledge that God is with the Exiles in Babylon and that, like His people, God is mourning and lamenting.

In the second parable, a king has given his beloved son "a golden necklace... and hung it upon his neck. It was not long before the son made the father angry. Thereupon, the father took away the necklace and made chains for his son and put them upon his son's feet." The midrash explains that God had originally taken the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and fashioned them into a necklace—the Torah. After Israel rejected the Torah, God took the letters and arranged them into acrostics (The Scroll of Lamentations) "to indicate the grievous events befalling Israel." Israel's perception of the Torah as a burden has resulted in its transformation from an ornament into a real burden.

A discussion of the authorship of the Scroll of Lamentations turns into a comparison of the relative merits and faults of Jeremiah and Elijah.[70] The midrash states that Jeremiah was honored in that the Scroll of Lamentations "made it ascribe itself to him." The implication is that Israel accepts its punishment and God's justice. Nevertheless, hidden within this passage is criticism of Elijah (and, by association, possibly of Jeremiah, too), for not speaking more forcefully on behalf of Israel.[71]

That the body of this *pisqa* consists of two father-son parables is not coincidental. The stories are obviously different and probably represent two different sources; the father-figure in the first parable represents Israel, in the

[70] Friedmann notes (*Pisqa* 29/30, n. 9) that this passage is incomplete. Cf. *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (ed. Lauterbach) *Parasha* 1 for a parallel version in which Jonah, Jeremiah and Elijah are discussed.

[71] Cf. above, the discussion of the ending of *Pisqa* 26. See also Braude, p. 569, n. 10. And yet, the very mention of Elijah, the harbinger of the Messiah, may be seen as foreshadowing redemption in the days to come.

second, God. Yet, two common threads run through the two: In addition to the basic relationship which informs the two stories, they both also contain criticism toward the father. In the first story, the father is guilty of neglect and overly harsh treatment of his son; in the second, he seems to be overreacting to all-too-natural rebellion.[72]

[72] Still,it must be pointed out that the son's becoming a slave is in itself a motif (cf. Joseph as well as *Pisqa'ot* 26 and 27), and that in comparison to the actions of the Israelite father, turning the son into a slave is by far the lesser punishment.

Pisqa 29/30A—First Sabbath of Consolation

Nahamu, Nahamu `Ammi — Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Is. 40:1)

The question regarding God's justice and mercy, until now implied, is stated outright: "Shall mere man be more just than his Creator?" By examining the Scroll of Ruth, the midrash sets up a comparison between Ruth and Israel, and contrasts God's comforting to that of Boaz.

The story of Ruth is set during the harvest following the end of Naomi's exile.[73] Ruth, like Abraham, has abandoned the idolatrous ways of her own father and mother. Thus, despite her despised origins as a Moabite, Ruth's turning to God is deemed a righteous act. Boaz explains to Ruth that her acceptance into the Israelite community is made possible by the "new interpretation of the law concerning proselytes."[74] All that is necessary now, teaches the midrash, is the act of *teshuvah*, turning to God. Based on the conclusions of the previous *pisqa'ot*, where it was argued that Israel's actions parallel God's, and that the gates of *teshuvah* are never closed,[75] it follows that God's acceptance of Israel's repentance is inevitable.

The *nehemta* of this section is dual, based on the "doubling" motif implied in the Isaiah pericope.[76] Moreover, each of Boaz's two consolations is also doubled. In the first consolation, Boaz's statement, "It hath been *told and told* me" (Ruth 2:11), refers to Ruth's "good conduct in the house" as well as her "good conduct in the field." In the second consolation, Boaz assures Ruth that

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[73] Cf. Braude, *Pisqa* 27:1.

[74] The use of Ruth and this explanation by Boaz may be understood as demonstrating not only the union of the Hagiographa and the Pentateuch, but also "The union of the Written Law with the Oral" (Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue*, 2 vols. [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1971], Vol. 1, p.13).

[75] Cf. above, *Pisqa* 29, note 2.

[76] See above, *Pisqa* 29, note 1.

"He who gives recompense to the righteous will give you your recompense," and that Solomon, the builder of the Temple, will descend from Ruth. The double consolation implied here is that not only will Ruth herself be redeemed, but that she also will become a source of redemption for Israel in the future.

With cause for consolation shown, the midrash teaches about God's power to console and comfort, using wings as a symbol for that power. Five of God's creations are said to possess wings:[77] The earth, the sun, the morning star, the cherubim, and the seraphim. These are all symbols of strength and life which, in fact, at times had become objects of idolatry.[78] The question posed at the opening of this *pisqa*, "Shall mere man be more just than his Creator?" is thus reinterpreted to mean that God is more powerful than His creations. It follows that God's ability to comfort—illustrated by the phrase "The Lord, God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:12)—is immeasurable.

As an answer to Israel's plaint that it has no comforter,[79] Ruth acknowledges that she does indeed have a redeemer, replying to Boaz: "Thou hast comforted me" (Ruth 2:13). The midrash thus assures Israel that, just as Boaz has succeeded in comforting Ruth, so God will succeed in comforting Israel.

Having assured Israel of God's power to comfort, the *pisqa* moves on to assure Israel that it can indeed be the recipient of comforting. The midrash relates that the heart has ten capabilities: It can see, speak, know, hear, stand,

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[77] *Gimmatriya*, numerology, plays a prominent role in Rabbinic thought. The numbers four, six, and ten appear often in *Pisqa* 29/30 A:3.
[78] Cf. Braude, *Pisqa* 31:2.
[79] See *Pisqa* 29, note 5 above.

fall, walk, cry out, be glad, and be comforted.[80] Descriptive of the process of natural growth and maturation, these are the life-cycle events of a child-turning-adult. Israel's comforting is thus shown to be part of the larger plan of life. As long as the body is alive, its process of growth is inevitable. Israel, teaches the Midrash, should not lose hope and remain confident that the final step of its maturation will arrive.

Next, four aspects of God's relationship to Israel in the past are explored and developed.[81] God has forewarned Israel through prophets. God has adorned Israel with many ornaments ("As R. Johanan said: The day the Holy One went down to give the Torah, sixty myriads of ministering angels with crowns to crown Israel descended with Him"). God has given Israel the booty of four realms (Egypt, Sihon and Og, "the booty of the Red Sea, and the booty of the thirty-one kings of Canaan"). God has met Israel in six locations (the "Temple which is to endure for ever"[82] is the sixth). God has redeemed Israel six times from the time of the Exodus from Egypt to the Revelation at Mount Sinai.

However, there appears to be a breach between God and Israel now ("But alas, thy breach is great like the sea; only He can heal thee"). God can heal that breach, but first Israel must be reconciled with God.[83]

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[80] These "Ten Steps to Recovery" may be seen as an outline of sorts for the Tish`ah Be-'Av *pisqa'ot*. Thus, *Pisqa* 26 is about birth and formation, about seeing, and about speaking (prophecy); 27 is about hearkening and the consequences of not doing so; 27-8 are about standing–Zedekiah as king–and falling– '*He cast down from heaven unto earth the glorious image of Israel*' (Lam. 2:1)." *Pisqa'ot* 28, 29, and 29/30 are about walking—exile—and crying out. Gladness and comforting inform the rest of these *pisqa'ot*.

[81] The four are based on the uncertain reading of אֲעוּדֵךְ —*a`ydaykh* — in Lam. 2:13. Cf. Braude, pp. 574-75, nn. 11-13.

[82] Cf. the *petihta* to *Pisqa* 29: "This is my resting place *for ever*" (*`adei `ad*).

[83] The sea, a pool of water as salty as tears, may be seen as a purifying agent in itself; see the *petihta* to *pisqa* 29.

Returning to the opening of this section, which refers to prophets, the Rabbis ask a pointed question: "Who can heal thy prophets for thee?" Though the reference is to the false prophets spoken of in Lam. 2:14, by implication, the question extends to the ability of *any* of the prophets to console Israel. How reliable are the prophets as *`edim* — witnesses? Since their value as true or false prophets is unclear until after the event, can the people reasonably be expected to believe their words? Further, if the prophets' ability to forewarn is questioned, so is their ability to console.

The Rabbis' running argument with God's justice, heretofore only implied, now becomes spoken, as the midrash recalls Abraham's argument with God before Sodom's destruction. "As Rabbi Levi construed the words, Abraham went on to say, "The Judge of all the earth cannot exercise justice too strictly... If Thou wilt not relent a little, the world will not endure." Abraham's pursuit of righteousness—"making out My creatures to be righteous"— merits him God's blessing. By extension, it is this very form of the pursuit of righteousness that will merit Israel redemption.[84] "With thee," says God to Abraham (and to the Prophets and to the Rabbis), "I make a beginning of speaking."

The midrash at this point returns to Isaiah, explaining how Isaiah becomes qualified to be a prophet.

Isaiah is said to be a student of Torah,[85] where he has heard God's voice seeking a proper spokesperson.[86] Despite being forewarned that the position might lead to "being smitten and put to shame," Isaiah replies, "I am ready to

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[84] Cf. *Pisqa* 33:3.
[85] "In the house of study:" *beit talmud.*
[86] Cf. the calling of Samuel, I Sam. 3.

give my back to the smiters." His chief qualification is his love of righteousness, in which he emulates Abraham.[87]

Speaking directly "from the mouth of the Divine Power," Isaiah prophesies in double terms that represent "a double portion of the Divine Power." Thus, his "*naḥamu, naḥamu `ammi*" ("Comfort ye, comfort ye My people") is a fitting response to "*ke'almanah... bakho tivkeh*" ("Weeping, she will weep... as a widow").

Isaiah's love for his people is matched by Israel's love for God. For the first time in these *pisqa'ot*, a pericope is cited from the Song of Songs, which for the Rabbis is the *non-plus-ultra* text expressing the love between God and Israel.

"*Oh, that Thou wert like a brother to me*" (Song of Songs 8:1) expresses Israel's longing for unfettered intimacy with God, unencumbered by shame or guilt. The phrase "like a brother" matches well Israel's status, *ke'almanah* ("as a widow"), illustrating a family relationship at the point of dissolution, but not quite severed. However, this is not the only point the midrash is making. It shifts the emphasis from the husband-wife or father-son quarrel to the one between siblings. The Talmud relates: "Why was the second Sanctuary destroyed seeing that in its time [the Israelites] were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] precepts, and the practice of charity? Because of the hatred without cause that prevailed among them."[88] Healing this rift, the one between brothers, will become a major concern of the next *pisqa'ot*.

Several dysfunctional sibling relationships are presented at first, before the one is found that combines both motifs of reuniting and consolation: Joseph and his brothers. In reassuring his brothers, Joseph says, "If I kill you now, the

[87] Jeremiah similarly spoke out on behalf of Israel; see *Pisqa* 29/30:2.
[88] B.T. *Yoma* 9b.

Egyptians will say: "Joseph did not keep faith with his own brothers. How much less likely is he to keep faith with others" (recalling Moses' plea to God not to destroy Israel).[89] Joseph further "comforted them by speaking to their hearts," a phrase that recalls the heart's capacity to be comforted.

In a play on Isaiah's doubled words of comfort to Israel, the *pisqa* offers two further proofs of God's consolation powers. The first is Job, whose sufferings parallel Jerusalem's. Just as "the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before,"[90] so Israel will be comforted with "a double recompense of comfort." Secondly, the midrash relates that it is God's custom "not to smite a people and leave her desolate... [but rather], He tries to console her [by citing comparable disasters]." It is for that reason "that the Ten Tribes were banished first and after them the Tribe of Judah," so that brothers could console brothers.

In the conclusion to this *pisqa*, the question the Rabbis had asked earlier about the reliability of the prophets, now is answered. A parable is told of a king "who had a vineyard which he proceeded to turn over to a tenant. When the vineyard produced good wine, the king" took credit for it; when the wine was bad, however, the king disclaimed it. Indignantly, the tenant argues, "Yet good or poor, the wine is yours." In the application of the parable, God speaks to Moses, telling him to "Bring forth *My* people."[91] But after Israel made the golden calf, God says: "*Thy* people... have dealt corruptly."[92] Protesting the double standard, "Moses would not move a step until God once again called them 'My people.'" Moses thus joins the ranks of Isaiah and Jeremiah (and by allusion, Abraham), prophets who argued the case of Israel before God.

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[89] Ex. 32:12.
[90] Job 42:10.
[91] Ex. 3:10.
[92] Ex. 32:7.

Finally, Isaiah reassures Israel that his words of consolation and comfort are meant not only for "the generation in whose days the Temple was destroyed," but also for "all the generations" to come.[93]

[93] As such, for the Rabbis, Isaiah was the precursor of the prophets who arose post-destruction; the midrash thus serves to unite the words of the late prophets with those of the early ones. Isaiah's claim of providing comfort for future generations foreshadows the words of the Messiah in *pisqa'ot* 34-37 and may be seen as an editorial gloss or as material drawn from a common source.

Pisqa 29/30 B –First Sabbath of Consolation[94]

Naḥamu, Naḥamu `Ammi — Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Is. 40:1)

The *petiḥta* pericope ("Oh that Thou wert like a brother to me") once again sets up a comparison between the God-Israel relationship and that of Joseph and his brothers.[95] Israel prays that God will be as a shepherd to the people, and God responds that He will comfort Israel as Joseph had done to his brothers.

But despite the optimism of the *petiḥta,* comfort is not yet in sight. The midrash quotes Job, who speaks the mind of Israel—and the Rabbis: "As for the words that you claim you bring back from God, all that I see remaining of them is *ma`al.*"[96] The harshness of the accusation is evident from the disagreement between Rabbi Abba bar Kahana and "our Masters from the South" over the exact meaning of the word *ma`al.*[97] To the former, the meaning of *ma'al* was *kazab* ("an act of faithlessness").[98] The Masters of the South understood the word as "contradictory." The underlying question in either case is whether the holy bond between God and Israel has been breached—and the extent of God's accountability.

The *pisqa* develops its argument through the examples of eight prophets (Hosea, Joel, Amos, Nahum, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi),[99]

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[94] In the division of the *pisqa'ot*, I follow Braude. However, Braude's separation of *Naḥamu, Naḥamu `Ammi*, the *pisqa* for the first Sabbath of Consolation, into three separate units seems to me somewhat confusing. However, see Braude, p. 582 n. 1, for his explanation.
[95] See *Pisqa* 29/30A:6.
[96] Job 21:34. The accusation is quite harsh. In Lev. 5, the use of *ma'al* indicates that it is an act of treachery, whereby a verbal or written agreement or vow is broken, or something belonging to God or to the Temple is taken. See also Joshua 7:1, where Achan's action, stealing items from the interdicted spoils of Jericho, is called *ma'al.*
[97] See also Friedmann, p.138b, nn. 9-11.
[98] Braude, p. 584.
[99] Cf. *Pisqa* 29/30 A:10.

sent by God to deliver comfort to Israel, but whose prophecies of disaster stood in contradiction to their words of comfort.[100] Israel refuses to accept consolation from these prophets.[101] Returning to God with their message undelivered, God says to them: "Come with Me. You and I shall go to [Zion] and comfort her [together]: *Comfort ye, comfort ye together with Me, saith your God.*"[102]

Another interpretation of the pericope shows a reversal in God's attitude towards being comforted. In *Pisqa* 28:2, God refuses consolation from the angels. Now, however, as the "owner" of a vineyard that was destroyed, God admits the human-like characteristic of needing comforting.[103] Though the divine parallel to Israel's state may serve to ease Israel's pain, God's weakened position adds to the doubts about His ability to redeem Israel.

With the comforting of Zion still a burning question, the midrash offers a compelling reason to believe that the promise of consolation will be fulfilled. In a section that displays the technical prowess of the midrashist, verses of consolation from Isaiah refute verses of mourning from Lamentations.[104] The arrangement of the verses merits discussion.

Nine verse-pairs are presented without comment. The tenth verse (Lam. 1:10) relates the defilement of the Sanctuary by those interdicted from entering it. The midrash explains that at the time of the destruction of the Temple, Ammonites and Moabites entered it, "seeking the Torah to erase from it

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[100] Cf. *Midrash Ha-Gadol* (Margulies edition) to Genesis 50:21, where Isaiah complains that all the prophecies of doom had been fulfilled, unlike the words of comfort.

[101] In rejecting the words of comfort, Israel describes them as *hevel* ("vapor"), a word that recalls both Abel (the brother who found no compassion), and the words of the Preacher in Ecc. 1:2.

[102] This interpretation is made possible by changing the vocalization of the word *`ammi* ("My people") to *`immi* ("with Me").

[103] Cf. *Pisqa* 26:7, where Jeremiah's need to be comforted makes him unable at first to comfort

[104] The scroll's author is reputed to be Jeremiah. Interestingly, one of the verses of consolation attributed to Isaiah is actually from Jeremiah. Cf. Friedmann, p. 140b, n. 47.

'An Ammonite or a Moabite shall not enter into the assembly of the Lord'" (Deut. 23:4).[105]

The eleventh verse speaks of the famine during the siege of Jerusalem. Two stories are told, the first of Abikah, the son of Gabyati, whose bravery in battle was exemplary, but who was felled by hunger. The second story is of Miriam, the daughter of Nakdimon, "who was a widow waiting for the *yabam* to marry or refuse to marry her." Reminiscent of Ruth as well as of Tamar (waiting to be redeemed by Boaz and Judah respectively), Miriam is said to have been haughty before the siege; once the famine set in, however, she was reduced to "gathering bran and barley out of the dung of cattle."

The two tales of famine occasion a double consolation, one from God, referring to abundance "in the time to come", and one from Isaiah, in itself a double: "Ye shall eat the wealth of the nations, and through their splendor shall ye revel".[106]

Six further verse couplings are offered as a conclusion to the *pisqa*, with the last returning to the pericope, "Comfort ye, comfort ye My people, saith your God."

[105] Cf. *Pisqa* 29/30 A:1. No alteration of the Torah is possible. Ruth, a Moabite, was admitted into the congregation by "the new interpretation of the law," a clear reference to the Rabbis and their role in Redemption.
[106] Is. 61:6.

Pisqa 30 –First Sabbath of Consolation[107]

Naḥamu, Naḥamu `Ammi — Comfort ye, comfort ye My people" (Is. 40:1)

Quoting Lam. 2:13, the *petiḥta* shows Jeremiah attempting to comfort Jerusalem "by likening her suffering to the suffering of other cities that had been plundered. Like all the Prophets, he sought a likeness for Jerusalem but could not find an appropriate one."[108] Two stories follow, one of a man who refuses to be consoled after the death of his beloved wife; the other, of a father who refuses to be consoled after the death of his son.[109] The symbolism is clear: It is God who refuses to be consoled for His loss. Thus, the *pisqa* succeeds in matching Jerusalem and God as partners in consoling each other. The citations used to support this argument reinforce the relationship of a master and his loyal servant (Ps. 123:2), as well as that of the loving husband and wife. God's renewed joy in Israel is paralleled by the cessation of weeping and crying in Jerusalem (Is. 65:19).

The body of the *pisqa* reflects the reality of the Diaspora and, through two stories, poses the question of God's presence among the exiles. Israel is offered the choice of any of the Patriarchs (as well as Moses, Aaron, David, and Solomon) as their leader while in exile.[110] Claiming that the Patriarchs do not recognize Israel as their descendants; Israel entreats God to lead it out of Jerusalem, as "Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer."[111]

The second story is a parable of a childless king and his wife. The king

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[107] See n. 1 to my analysis of *pisqa* 29/30B.
[108] See *Pisqa* 29/30 A:8.
[109] The two stories follow the "doubling" structure established by the pericope.
[110] "I shall raise up any one of them from his grave, and he will lead you." God's power to bring the dead back to life (cf. *Pisqa* 27:2) is an underlying motif in this *pisqa*.
[111] For a discussion of the possible reasons for the breach between Israel and the Patriarchs, see below, pp. 2-3.

wishes to free his wife so that she may perhaps have children by another man. However, he does allow her to "take every precious thing that I have in my house." Like Esther,[112] the queen invites the king to a banquet "so that people will not say: Look you, the king's wife–he hates her, and he has put her out of his house." The king becomes drunk and the wife has him carried out of the palace to her father's house. Upon the king's awakening and questioning his whereabouts, the wife responds that, following his request, she has taken with her the most precious thing in her life. She adds, "Except for you, [my lord], I have nothing which is a delight to my eyes and a joy to my life." This story teaches that wherever Israel goes, as long as God accompanies the people, Israel is in "her father's house."

The loyalty and love shown to God by the people of Israel convince God to accompany them on their exile Himself.

Yet, the question of the proper redeemer still stands. Once again, God sends the Patriarchs and Moses to Israel, this time to offer comforting. Israel, however, rejects all four. In a sense, this rejection counters the earlier rejection of Israel by the Patriarchs, implied by Israel's claim, "Abraham knoweth us not, and Israel doth not acknowledge us." The reason for the Patriarchs' rejection of Israel could be that the sins of Israel had estranged the people from their righteous ancestors. For its own part, Israel gives valid reasons for not accepting the Patriarchs' consolation: Like the Prophets,[113] the Patriarchs deliver mixed messages, blessings as well as curses, and consolation as well as prophecies of destruction. Abraham's vision of Jerusalem is "as a bare mountain;" Isaac is the father of Jacob, but also of Israel's enemy, Esau

[112] The allusion to Esther is not coincidental. Both stories are allegories of Israel in exile.
[113] Cf. *Pisqa* 29:30B:2.

(symbolic of Rome); Jacob foresees the destruction of the Temple.[114] And Moses set down in writing the evil decrees of "the wasting of hunger, and the devouring of the fiery bolt."[115]

Yet, there is another possible explanation for the breach between the Patriarchs and Israel, one that already can be perceived in *Pisqa'ot* 26:6 and 27/28:2: The merits of the Fathers are not sufficient guarantee for redemption.[116] In every generation, every individual must be responsible for maintaining the relationship between God and Israel. That is why in the midrash, following Israel's rejection of the Patriarchs' words of consolation, God responds by citing Ex. 22:5: "He that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution."[117]

With the direct, personal, relationship between God and Israel thus established, God, too, must abide by God's own justice: "Since I set her on fire, as is said, 'From on high has He sent fire' (Lam. 1:13), I must comfort her, as is said, 'For I, saith the Lord, will be unto her a wall against the fire round about' (Zech. 2:9)."[118]

God's power of reviving the dead, discussed above,[119] is shown again, through two examples: An Israelite who is chased by a heathen but is felled by a snake sent by God; and:

> Again, when they slew Ben Koseba and brought his head before Hadrian, the Emperor said: "Bring me his body also;" and then they found a serpent coiled around his heart. "We did not slay him," said Hadrian, "but the Holy One, blessed be He, brought him into our hands, as written in your Torah: 'Their Rock had given them over'" (Deut. 32:30).

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[114] Gen. 28:17.
[115] Deut. 32:24.
[116] Cf. *Pisqa* 34:2, however, where it is said that the Messiah will redeem even those who "manage to get along only by resorting to the merit of their fathers."
[117] Cf. *Pisqa* 26:6, where the Temple is set on fire by angels.
[118] The citation of verses from the three sections of the Bible serves to unify them. See above, my analysis of *Pisqa* 29/30A, n. 2.
[119] *Pisqa* 27:2.

The point these stories make is that, as God destroyed Jerusalem, so God *must*, according to His own laws of justice, rebuild Jerusalem—all, of course, as long as the direct relationship between God and Israel is maintained.

In the *nehemta*, God Himself comes to offer comforting words to Jerusalem, citing a verse from Song of Songs: "Open to Me, My sister" (Song of Songs 5:2). This seems to be the phrase Israel had been waiting to hear ever since Israel's own request, "Oh, that Thou wert like a brother to me" (Song of Songs 8:1). However, in the manner established above,[120] Israel puts forth a condition before it accepts God's offer. At this point in the development of the relationship, Israel is ready to question God directly regarding the measure of His justice: Since, out of all the nations who had been offered the Torah, it was Israel alone who accepted it, "how couldst Thou have done to them what Thou hast done?" God accepts the reproof, only to be told further that the renewed relationship must not be kept secret. "Who will let the nations of the earth know about me that I have done Thy will? They revile, abuse, and mock me, saying: 'You rebelled against your God and you were faithless to Him."[121]

God agrees to prove to all nations that Israel is God's faithful servant, saying, "I will declare thy righteousness; thy works also" (Isa. 57:12). Finally satisfied, "Michael and Jerusalem will say: 'The Lord hath brought forth our victory; come, and let us declare in Zion the work of the Lord our God'" (Jer. 51:10).

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[120] *Pisqa* 29/30 A:10. See also *Pisqa* 36:1.
[121] This probably reflects Christian polemics.

Pisqa 31—Second Sabbath of Consolation

Va-ttomer Tzion—"But Zion said" (Is. 49:14)

The issue addressed in the first part of this *pisqa* is how to lead a Jewish life in the post-destruction time. What is the role of mourning for Jerusalem in the context of "normal" life, particularly in the Diaspora? The halakhic *petiḥta* poses this question at its very beginning: "Let our master instruct us: After the Ninth of Ab has passed by, is one permitted to partake of every kind of food?"

The *halakha*, as taught by Rabbi Hiyya, the Elder, is that "after the Ninth of Ab has passed by, a man is permitted to partake of every kind of food." This answer is explained through the rules of the *'onen*, the mourner, whose dead is not yet buried. "But as soon as the corpse was buried, the mourner might partake of [meat and wine]."[122]

The reasoning behind this change in Israel's status is rooted in the acceptance of, and faith in, God's promise of redemption. This promise, demonstrated and proven in *pisqa* 30:3, is reiterated in the *petiḥta* of *Pisqa* 31: "The Holy One, blessed be He, said: 'As ye live,[123] I burned it... but I shall rebuild it.'"

However, the rebuilding is still in the future. Israel's mourning is not over, and as the people's woes increase through the years, so does its questioning of the extent and appropriateness of God's justice: "I have not been redeemed, and therefore I despair. Can it be, O my Lord, that Thou hast forsaken me?"

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[122] It is important to note, however, that, though a return to "normal" life is presumed, nevertheless the stage that follows *'onenut* is actually *shiv'ah*, in itself a period of intense mourning.

[123] This idiom is the key to understanding the whole *pisqa*. *As long as Israel lives*, redemption is certain to come.

The Rabbis' task at this point is dual: They must bolster Israel's faith, and they must show Israel the proper way to bridge the seeming chasm between Destruction and Redemption.

Rabbi Tanhuma bar Abba begins his discourse in a seemingly harsh manner, attacking Israel's right to question God's justice in the first place. Who has forsaken whom, he asks. Israel must "look into the chambers of [its] own heart" and examine the extent of its own iniquities before questioning the severity of the punishment.

Using an allegory in which a person "leaves a deposit with another,"[124] Rabbi Tanhuma explains that Israel's life is such a deposit, and that God expects the performance of *mitzvot* as repayment. Israel stands accused of committing three crimes punishable by death—adultery (symbolizing idolatry), murder ("[Israel] slew the prophets"),[125] and profanation of the Sabbath (symbol of the relationship between God and Israel). And yet Israel is alive, and its soul is restored each and every morning. What right has Israel to complain, then?

Replying to Israel's demand that the unbroken relationship between God and the people be made public,[126] the public nature of Israel's idolatrous ways is also exposed. Before Jerusalem was destroyed, whole families would worship Venus, going so far as "to make a narrow opening in the house... which was lined up exactly toward the east, so that when Venus, the morning star, rose,

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[124] The motif of "deposit" or "pawning" runs throughout this *pisqa.*
[125] *Pisqa* 31:8.
[126] *Pisqa* 30:4.

[they] might get up and worship it." Moreover, the idolaters would take pride in their worship, even as they would mock the Nazirite for his long hair.[127]

Israel's childish excuse, that it simply followed the example set by its neighbors, elicits a reprimand that can be understood as an attack against assimilation. Israel is charged with following the wrong example, that of the "nations of the earth," when they should have followed the examples of Abraham, Sarah and Isaac.[128]

Responding to the "cry against the measure of God's justice," the midrash tells of four prophets who raised this question on behalf of Israel: David, Jeremiah, Asaph, and the Sons of Korah.

David had asked God, "Why standest Thou afar off... why hidest Thou Thyself in times of trouble?" (Ps. 10:1). The response to David (who is called *shakhen*, "neighbor")[129] is that it was Israel that distanced itself from God. During the three-and-a-half years of Jerusalem's siege, "the Presence stood on the Mount of Olives calling every day," warning Jerusalem to repent.[130] "But the children of Israel did not even try to do penance."

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[127] The Nazirite, a man who has dedicated his life—or a portion of it—to God, was recognizable by his hair, which was as a crown (*nezer*) on his head. In Gen. 49:26, Joseph is referred to as a Nazirite (literally: "the crowned one" or "elect"); in light of the verse, as well as of the tradition that the Messiah will be a son of Joseph (see below, my analysis of *Pisqa* 32, n. 2), it is possible to interpret this line from the *pisqa* as referring to the mockery the Messiah has to endure. Cf. also *Pisqa* 34, below.

[128] *Pisqa* 31:2: "Isaac carried sticks of wood like a man carrying his cross." This example of *Qiddush ha-Shem* is a clear reference to the "suffering servant" motif, embodied by Isaiah (*Pisqa*

[129] David's portrayal as God's neighbor in heaven could be interpreted to mean that David is the Messiah or the Messiah's precursor. The word *shakhen* is a pun on *mishkan*—the Temple—as well as "pawn" (cf. note 3 above). By extension, then, the Messiah is also "pawned," held until all Israel's debts are paid up. See below, *Pisqa* 33, n. 17.

[130] The Mount of Olives was the last of the ten stages of God's withdrawal from the Holy of Holies. See Bernard Mandelbaum, ed., *Pesikta de Rav Kahana*, 2 vols., (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1962), Vol. 1, pp. 234-35.

The questions posed by the other three prophets are answered similarly: It was Israel that forsook God; Israel which cast off God; Israel which hid its face from God.

Though the four prophets' questions regarding God's measure of justice had conclusively answered, Jeremiah, as as spokesman for Israel, is allowed to ask God yet another set of questions: "Jeremiah asked four things of the Holy One, blessed be He... The four things were: rejecting, abhorring, forsaking, and forgetting."[131] In its answer, the midrash tells a disturbing tale of a king and a queen. The queen "used to treat the king's honor lightly by setting aside his decrees."[132] The angry king commands his servants to drag her out by her hair. The queen's champion questions this punishment: Is God's relationship with Israel terminated (in which case the just thing to do would be not to kill the queen, but divorce her). Otherwise, if God has not rejected Israel totally, "Why dost Thou smite us, so that there is no healing for us?" (Jer. 14:19). Jeremiah is not asking about God's right to punish Israel: "You can do as you like with her, because a man is master of his wife." Rather, Jeremiah is wondering about the duration of the suffering and its appropriateness.

God's reply refers Jeremiah to "the teacher of teachers, Moses, the teacher of all the Prophets." Quoting Lev. 26:44, God assures Jeremiah that Israel is neither rejected nor abhorred by God. The insinuation in that reference is that, if Israel had studied the Torah, there would be no need to ask the question in the first place. Torah study, it follows, is one way to bridge the chasm that seems to exist between God and Israel, between destruction and redemption.

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[131] Jeremiah's question reflects Israel's concern, echoing Christian polemics, that its relationship with God might be severed. See above, *Pisqa* 30, n. 15.

[132] This could be construed as an oblique reference to the Wayward and Rebellious Son (Lev. 20:9), who insults or mocks (*yekallel*) his father and mother, a sin punishable by death.

However, the midrashist is not satisfied with mere insinuation regarding the importance of Torah study. He spells it out: "If you need Me to bring the time of redemption I need you to keep My Torah and bring about sooner the rebuilding of My House and of Jerusalem." The pact of mutual responsibility is represented by the symbol of fire: "At His right hand was a fiery law [*'esh-dat*] unto them" (Deut. 33:2). Fire, previously seen as a form of punishment from God, now has become a vehicle for maintaining the relationship between God and Israel.

Responding to Jeremiah's question concerning God's forgetting Israel, the midrash retells the story of the banishment of Israel from its land.[133] Upon arrival at the rivers of Babylon, "some Israelites turned to food and drink; and some turned to weeping and mourning."

Asked to turn their weeping into song and to sing Temple songs for Nebuchadnezzar,[134] the Levites, "with extraordinary will power... either mangled their thumbs or bit them off," rather than play their harps. For their act of selfless devotion, the Levites are rewarded by being allowed to return to Zion.[135]

Qiddush ha-Shem (martyrdom) earns for Israel God's pledge, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let My right hand forget her cunning." Thus, mourning and

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[133] It is noteworthy that this retelling of *Pisqa* 28 is found in a midrash that opens with an *halakhic petihta*. *Pisqa* 28 itself is followed by an *halakhic petihta*. This mirroring structure, which shows the narrator/editor's mastery of his craft, can hardly be coincidental.

[134] This act would make Nebuchadnezzar a substitute for God, a parallel to Pharaoh before the Exodus.

[135] Cf. B.T. *Baba Batra* 70b: "Whoever mourns for Jerusalem will be privileged to behold her joy."

suffering take their place next to the study of Torah, both seen as necessary steps leading to redemption — both of Israel and of God's right hand.[136]

Having examined Israel's complaints toward God and shown them to be without foundation, the midrashist proceeds to establish his view of the way things are. Now, Israel is homeless. In the time-to-come, however, God "will prepare tents, canopies of glory for the righteous."[137] Now, Israel seems to be without God's protection; in the time-to-come, God's presence will be visible to all, appearing as "a cloud and smoke by day, and a flaming fire by night" (Is. 4:5, paralleling the symbol of God's protection of Israel during the wanderings in Sinai). When God's right hand is released, song and rejoicing will replace mourning: "The voice of rejoicing and joy at deliverance [is heard] in the tents of the righteous, [because] the right hand of the Lord is exalted, the right hand of the Lord doeth valiantly" (Ps. 118:15-16).

However, the time of redemption, though revealed to Daniel, is hidden from the rest of the world: "But go thou thy way till the time be; and thou shalt rest, and shalt stand up to thy lot at the time of the right hand" (Dan. 12:13), a time the midrashist explains as "The time when the Right Hand awakes."[138]

Doubling the consolation, the midrashist continues his comparison of the present situation to that in the time-to-come. Currently, at the shores of the

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[136] The midrash explains that God's right hand, symbolic of God's power, is, as it were, held in pawn. The pun relating pawn (also "security" or "pledge") —*mashkon*—and "dwelling"—*mishk'not* —generally, and the Temple—*mishkan* —specifically, is one the rabbis were familiar with. Thus we find:אל תהא קורא מִשְׁכָּנִי אלא מַשְׁכּוֹנִי ("Do not read 'My tabernacle' —*mishkani*—but rather 'My pledge' —*mashkoni*"[Ex. Rabbah 31:10]); and מִשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ אלא מַשְׁכְּנוֹתֶיךָ אל תהי קורא ("read not 'thy dwellings' — *mishk'notekha*— but rather 'thy pledges' —*mashk'notekha*— for the Tabernacle and the Temple were to be forfeited [יתמשכנו —*yitmashk'nu*—] by Israel when they sinned" [Num. Rabbah 12:14]). Likewise, in Ex. Rabbah 35:4: "The sanctuary stands as a pledge, so that if the enemies of Israel became deserving of

[137] The use of the word "tent" is a reference to the Tent of Meeting and the Temple. Cf. *Pisqa* 28:1. "Canopies" (*hupa*) is a parallel term referring to the union of love between God and Israel.

[138] Cf. Song of Songs 2:6-7.

Rivers of Babylon, the mourning and weeping Levites will not sing of the songs of Zion. However, "when thou redeemest us from enslavement... and deliverest Thy right hand, it will be our joy to sing songs and Psalms on account of the wonders Thou wilt do for us, and for the deliverances Thou wilt give Thy right hand."[139]

The midrash places in perspective Israel's claims of abandonment. Israel compares itself to the "gleanings, forgotten sheaves" that are left at the edge of the fields. The midrash reminds Israel that even gleanings have a purpose, feeding the poor and hungry. The analogy, however, serves to bring to mind the story of Ruth and Boaz and recalls to both the reader and God that Israel is still awaiting its redemption.

Israel sees itself as an overburdened beast. In this example, too, Israel is not abandoned; its burden is its mission. Nevertheless, at times this burden is a heavy load, and God is reminded of God's own law of mercy: "Thou shalt surely shoulder the burden together with him" (Ex. 23:5).

Israel is cautioned, however, not to confuse its current state—waiting for redemption—with abandonment. The reader is reminded that, at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the Daughters of Jerusalem were not mourning, but rather were hoping to attract "the Babylonian generals." God, however, struck them with all manner of physical disfiguration.[140] "Their comeliness thus marred, the generals would not mate with them and hence could not mar the purity of the lineage of the daughters of Zion." The lesson Israel is taught—in addition to the not-so-subtle message regarding assimilation—is that what

[139] Cf. Ex. 15:1: "Then will Moses and the Israelites sing...."

[140] In one of these examples of punishment/protection—bloody discharge—the verb used is *`.r.h* —ערה— ("to empty out"), possibly foreshadowing the reference in *Pisqa* 32 to Ps. 137:7 (עָרוּ עָרוּ עַד הַיְסוֹד בָּהּ).

seems to be punishment is actually a sign of God's love of Israel and the maintenance of the Covenant.

A thematic outline of this lengthy *pisqa* might serve to elucidate the logic and flow of its ideas, and to shed light on the unexpected length and form of the closing sections that comprise the *nehemta.*[141]

The *petihta* (Section One), based on Israel's cry of desperation, "I have not been redeemed, and therefore I despair," sets up the issues that will be discussed in the *pisqa* : Israel's despair is ill-founded. The loss of hope, equivalent to loss of faith, is enough to make Israel undeserving of redemption. Sections Two and Three address Israel's questioning of God's justice, showing that it is indeed tempered with mercy—as demonstrated by Israel's continued survival. Sections Four through Seven show Israel's complaints of abandonment to be based on mistaken perception: Israel is like the Messiah; they both have a mission. However, whereas the Messiah understands and accepts the suffering associated with his mission, Israel's perception of its mission is as a burden. The midrashist 's role is to show Israel that its very mission is a validation of the Covenant between God and Israel. The time of redemption—hastened by Israel's maintaining its distinct identity, by *Qiddush ha-Shem* and by Torah study—will arrive when that mission is accomplished.

Sections Eight, Nine and Ten form the *nehemta* of *Pisqa* 31 and might be seen almost as a separate homily, with its own *petihta, gufa*, and *nehemta*. This self-contained sermon-within-a-sermon is like a musical *coda*, serving to underscore the redemption that it announces.

[141] In the unit divisions, I follow Braude.

Section Eight, the *petihta* of this "coda," returns to the theme of Israel's despondence. However, whereas before, this mood was based on the mistaken perception of abandonment, now it is due to Israel's contrition. Accepting its guilt, Israel seeks assurance that God's justice will not outweigh His mercy. God's reassuring reply is that, as long as Israel proves its attachment to God, God will "forget thy evil deeds and not forget thy good deeds."

David, the psalmist/singer exemplar, calls upon God to hasten redemption. Five psalms are cited in which David calls on God to arise in Israel's defense.[142] Psalm 10:12 is representative of these requests: "Arise, O Lord; O God, lift up Thy hand; forget not the humble." Combining several motifs, a parable is told in which a father saves his son from drowning by holding onto the child's hand. It is not enough, however, as "the waters of the River" soon overwhelm the child. David's plea to God, therefore, is to lift up His hand and so also raise Israel above the flooding water.

The last part of this midrash speaks of redemption itself. "In an acceptable time" (Is. 49:8), the mountains will be leveled so as to make a path for the returning exiles. The Ten Tribes exiled by Assyria will return to their homeland by various routes, including underground passageways that God will provide. "The Holy One, blessed be He, will stand upon the Mount [of Olives],[143] and after it is cleaved open for the exiles, they will come up out of it."[144] They will be joined by Jews from wherever they presently are. When all the exiles will have been gathered together, God will remove the sackcloth covering placed

[142] God's rise will be matched, at the time of redemption, by Israel's rise; cf. *Pisqa* 36, "Arise,
[143] Ostensibly, God will have returned to the Holy of Holies along the same ten steps of withdrawal by which He had left it (see note 9 above).
[144] The mountain will split as the Red Sea had before. The analogy is made possible through the use of the Hebrew verb *bk`* (בקע) in both instances (see Ex. 14:21).

upon the heavens, stretching instead a bridal canopy, and Israel will then become as God's bejeweled bride.

Pisqa 32—Third Sabbath of Consolation

`Aniyah So`arah—O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest" (Is. 54:11)

The theme of this *pisqa* is outer identity and inner meaning. In pursuing this dual theme, the *pisqa* "works" on two levels as well: The first part of the *pisqa* discusses the "outside" issue of Israel's perception and treatment by the oppressing nations, and the "inside" issue of the proper way to live as a Jew. In the second part, the "outside" is represented by Jerusalem's wall, and the "inside," by its foundations.

In *Pisqa* 31, David had become the representative and champion of Israel. He continues in this role in *Pisqa* 32. David's enemies are represented by Doeg—a general in the service of King Saul—and Ahithophel—one of the two chief advisors Absalom employed during his rebellion against his father. David accuses Doeg and Ahithophel of maligning and belittling him through their refusal to recognize him by his true name.[145] It is true that at least they recognize him as his father's son (in contrast to Jeremiah, whose parentage was questioned—and yet, even here some tension exists, as David is descended from Ruth, the Moabite); nevertheless, David demands the recognition and honor due to him as God's anointed. David's powerful enemies question his ability to deliver God's blessing: "Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards?" (1 Sam. 22:7).[146] Their claim that God has forgotten and abandoned David[147] is called "vanity,"[148] since God, through the

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[145] David's identity represents the "outside" motif.
[146] David's mission represents the "inside" motif.
[147] The parallel in *Midrash Tehillim* 3:4 adds: "God has removed His presence (*shekhinato*, a word related to *mishkan*, the Tabernacle) from him."
[148] The citation, Ps. 4:3 uses the word *kazab*, "falsehood." Cf. *Pisqa* 29/30B:2.

prophet Nathan, has told David, "The Lord also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die" (2 Sam. 12:13).

This story of David's personal/political struggles becomes an allegory in the next section of the *pisqa*. Whereas, in the Saul narrative, Doeg is identified as "the Edomite,"[149] in the Talmud, he appears not only as a Jew, but a great scholar at that.[150] In *Midrash Tehillim*,[151] Doeg appears as אב בית דין (Chief of the High Court) under King Saul, while his title ("Edomite," from *'adom*, "red") is derived from his wont to make those who dispute with him blush with shame at their ignorance.[152] Doeg is condemned by the Rabbis for using his knowledge of Torah to slander: "R. Ammi said: Doeg's Torah was merely from the lips outward."[153] Misusing—indeed, even abusing—his knowledge of Torah, Doeg, thus, symbolizes a man who may be knowledgeable, and yet is devoid of real wisdom.

Ahithophel is also called "great in Torah learning."[154] People would seek his advice "as a man would seek God's word,"[155] leading to the midrash's description of him שלא היה כאיש אלא כמלאך – "as one who was not human but rather an angel."[156] In the Talmud, his betrayal of David (described in 1 Sam. 28) is explained as stemming from his misinterpretation of a sign–לו על אמתו צרעת שזרחה ("leprosy that appeared on him") as indicating that he –Ahithophel–would become king instead of David.[157]

Doeg and Ahithophel, then, are representative of those who do not see

[149] 1 Sam. 21:8.
[150] B.T. *Sanhedrin* 106b.
[151] *Midrash Tehillim* 3:4.
[152] Ibid. 52:4.
[153] B.T. *Sanhedrin* 106b.
[154] *Midrash Tehillim* 3:4.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid.
[157] B.T. *Sanhedrin* 101b. Cf. *Pisqa* 31, in which leprosy appears on the foreheads of the haughty daughters of Jerusalem.

beyond external appearances. On one level, they are men of power bound to suffer reversal of fortunes, symbolizing the powerful nations that oppress Israel, and who will be brought down. On another level, they represent those segments within the Jewish population that, though powerful and knowledgeable in Torah, nevertheless mocked the truly chosen ones.[158]

The *petihta* concludes with a *nehemta* that promises the eventual reversal of Israel's current status as "afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted:" "Behold, I will lay thy stones in stibium, and set thy foundations with sapphires."[159]

With this return to the pericope, Israel's misery is subjected to midrashic interpretation. *`Aniyah*, "poor," ordinarily describing an economic situation, here is explained (especially in light of Doeg and Ahithophel) as "poor... in knowledge of Torah, poor in [the performance of] commandments and good works, poor in righteous men."[160] *So`arah*, "tossed with tempest," is interpreted in three ways, each based on a specific meaning or explanation of the word *`aru* in Ps. 137:7.

In the first of these, the word is seen as derived from the root *`r`r* (ערער), meaning "stirred up" or "tossed hither and yon;" it thus refers to the Israelites in exile.[161]

The next two explanations refer to the extent of destruction Jerusalem suffers. These explanations fit the duality of meanings underlying *Pisqa* 32—

[158] Cf. *Pisqa* 34, in which the Mourners of Zion are mocked by other Jews.
[159] Is. 54:11.
[160] Cf. *Pisqa* 29/30:2.
[161] Rashi's commentary on *makhon*, in B.T. *Hagigah* 12b, explains that *makhon* is the name of the sixth of the seven heavens comprising God's celestial dwelling, and the one wherein are stored the destructive elements or forces, *se`arah*–storm or tempest–among them. Thus, though it would seem that Israel is tossed about by the nations of the earth, the storm is actually God's doing. Cf. *Pisqa* 26:6, which relates that it was angels of God that set fire to the Temple, not the Babylonians. Cf., too, *Pisqa* 30:3, with its stories of the Israelite who is brought down by a snake, and of Ben Koseba, who also was delivered to the Romans by God.

the "outside" level and the "inside" level. According to the first interpretation, the Edomites called for the destruction of Jerusalem's walls—the outside level, serving both to define and to protect the city and its people. The "inner" level of explanation is based on the derivation of *'aru* from the root *'a.r.h* (ערה), meaning "to pour out" or "empty." In this light, the implication of the verse is that, in plundering Jerusalem, the Romans did not stop with the external defenses of the city, but also took away or emptied its very foundations.

The teaching of Rabbi Levi, "Whenever Scripture says, 'There is not,' it is implied that the alternative will be," allows the realization of the consolation offered by the pericope: God will rebuild the walls of Jerusalem *and* replace its foundations.[162]

The foundations will be replaced with sapphires, said by the midrash to be as indestructible as diamonds. The rebuilt walls will be inlaid with stibium. Commenting on the pericope phrase, "Behold, I will lay thy stones in stibium," the *pisqa* compares this to applying makeup around the eye to make it look wider and more beautiful.[163] The turrets upon the walls (*shimshotayikh*)[164] will be constructed of alternating stibium and sapphires (based on the interpretation of *kadkod* as "of this and of that"). Rabbi Joshua ben Levi interprets *shimshotayikh* not as "turrets," but as "luminaries to give thee light," and *kadkod* as "chalcedony."

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[162] This section (32:2 in Braude) contains one of the most fascinating rabbinic interpolations. Zion is said to have "not one that careth—*doresh*— for her" (Jer. 30:17). Isaiah is cited to clarify the word *doresh* : "And a *redeemer* will come to Zion" (Is. 59:20). Though the translation, "careth for her," is literally correct, it fails to convey the message intended by the Rabbis, namely that the anointed redeemer is the *darshan*, the midrashist Rabbis.

[163] In *Pisqa* 18 of *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana*, an additional comment explains that stibium is used for three other functions, all connected with the eye: To stop tearing, to thicken the eye lashes, and to cure a certain ailment. Thus, in both *Midrashim*, the eye appears in its motific function (seeing), while in the PRK, stibium, in addition to its motific function as ornament, is also a curative, symbolic of God's restorative powers.

[164] Is. 54:12.

Describing the intensity of the light produced by these gems, the midrash relates a story. The same Rabbi Joshua ben Levi is standing with the prophet Elijah on Mount Carmel (not only the site of the cave where Elijah hid from his oppressors, but also the site of his ultimate triumph over the priests of Ba`al).[165] Rabbi Joshua asks Elijah about the gems, and Elijah promises to show them to him. The prophet causes a storm to rise, endangering a boat that was then sailing on it.[166] The boat is "tossed about from the top of the waves to the sea bottom" (much like Jerusalem). Elijah entices a Jewish lad on board to run an errand for him, for the sake of which the boat will be saved (Israel's mission). Agreeing, the lad performs the task, which is to pick up "the stones of *kadkod* " that are lying at the bottom of the sea. He then takes them to Rabbi Joshua ben Levi (now in Lydda) and begs the great rabbi to follow him to a cave outside the city.[167] Uncovered, the stones shine so brightly, that despite the fact that the setting is a cave, they illuminate the whole city of Lydda. Startled, Rabbi Joshua drops the gems to the ground, and they disappear once again.[168] The moral may be drawn that that which cannot be seen, in the time-to-come will serve as a source of light for all to see by.

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[165] In accepting Elijah's sacrifice, "The fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." Following the return of the Israelites to God, rain falls and ends the drought (I K.18).

[166] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:9.

[167] PRK, at this point, emphasizes the great humility of Rabbi Joshua, who unquestioningly agrees to follow a mere lad a distance of three days walk (cf. Jonah). Humility is the opposite of pride, of which the Daughters of Jerusalem were accused, and it is curious that *Pesiqta Rabbati* omits this detail even though it does appear as a motif elsewhere (cf. below, the *nehemta* quote from Ps. 37:11, and *Pisqa* 31:7).

[168] The Friedmann edition offers: "and he was cut off." נגנזו – "they were hidden" –a reference to the messianic light created just before the Sabbath and stored away for the righteous, is the version appearing in the Parma MS, as well as in the parallel *pisqa* 18 of PRK. Though it is possible that "cut off" is mistaken, in Ex. Rabbah 15:21, a form of נגזר does appear in connection with light for the righteous, and it is possible that that is the source for the variance in the Prague Edition.

A similar story is told in relation to the Pearly Gate that is to be set into the rebuilt walls of Jerusalem. Rabbi Johanan, expounding on this image, is mocked by a traveling merchant. In a reprise of the story of the tempest-tossed boat, the scoffer is granted a vision of the gate being hollowed out of a great pearl, carved and shaped by ministering angels.[169] Returning to Rabbi Johanan, the merchant proclaims the truth of the rabbi's vision, adding: "Had I not beheld with mine own eyes what you are talking about, I still would not believe you." Rabbi Johanan then lifts his own eyes and looks at the faithless man,[170] whereupon "in that instant the man turned into a heap of bones." The message of this story seems to be that when one looks only with one's eyes, without the benefit of faith, one only sees the external aspects. Without faith, one sees the bare bones, not the potential for life within them.

The *nehemta* relates that in the days of the Messiah, the re-established borders of Jerusalem will be marked with precious stones. The poverty-stricken city and its population will experience a reversal of its fortunes; the overabundance of riches will yield a time when lawlessness and jealousy will be gone, replaced by justice and peace.

[169] This is the interpretation of *Pesiqta Rabbati*, choosing to explain *'ekdah* as "hollow out." *Midrash Tehillim* 87:1 offers: "R. Judah said in the name of R. Samuel bar Isaac: The great gate in Jerusalem together with its two wickets will be of one *carbuncle*," where *'ekdah* is seen as stemming from the root *k.d.h*, "to glow as with an inner fire." Cf. Is. 50:11.

[170] This is the Biblical motif indicating hope and salvation. Cf. Gen. 22:13, 24:63 and 24:64.

Pisqa 33—Fourth Sabbath of Consolation

'Anokhi, 'Anokhi — "I, even I, am He that comforteth you" (Is. 51:12)

This is one of three *halakhic petiḥta'ot* in the Tish`ah Be-'Av midrashim, and the opening question posed is one of direction in prayer: "Let our master instruct us: He who recites the *Tefillah* — upon what should he fix his heart?" The literal translation would be: "Whereto (*leheikhan*) should he direct (*lekhavein*) his heart?" Both Hebrew words derive from the root *k.v.n* ("direction" or "purpose"), whose letters form the mirror image of the word by which God identifies Himself: *'Anokhi.*[171] The *halakhah*, (the ruling), answer the Masters, is that the one who prays must direct his heart toward that which is within the Holy of Holies—God. Moreover, the implication of the *derash* is that God's response will take the precisely opposite direction, from the inside outwards.

The spiritual question becomes a geographical one through the light shed on it by Rabbi Eliezer ben Jacob, who added: "If he recites the *Tefillah* outside the Land, he is to recite it in the direction of the Land of Israel; if he recites it in the Land of Israel, he is to recite it in the direction of Jerusalem; if he recites it in Jerusalem, he is to recite it in the direction of the Temple; if he is reciting it in the Temple, he is to recite it towards that which is within the Holy of Holies." This "return" to the Land of Israel and the Temple in Jerusalem is meant to parallel God's own return.[172]

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[171] The Hebrew letter *waw* serves also as the vowel "o."
[172] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:10.

The one who prays is instructed to turn to "the tower of David, toward which all men turn while praying.'"[173] Facing in that direction, however, it becomes tragically clear that the Temple is in ashes, and Israel indeed asked: "Master of universes, how long shall the Temple be ashes?" Israel reminds God that "He that kindled the fire shall surely make restitution (Ex. 22:5).[174]

Thus approached, God turns toward Israel in favor, responding, "I am He that will comfort you," as the pericope from Isaiah teaches.

Following the halakhic *petihta*, Rabbi Tanhuma's discourse centers around Job. Job, who had earlier protested against the severity of God's justice,[175] is shown here as the ideal judge, pronouncing judgment "when the law and the facts of the case were clearly determined...; but when the facts of the case were obscure, [Job] would make inquiry and clear the obscurity up." Additionally, in his zeal for justice, Job served also as enforcing officer, whose duty it was to make the decree effective. Moreover, despite Job's importance among his people ("I chose out their way, and sat as chief"),[176] he never considered himself too important to comfort mourners. "Why? Because... I am not better than my Creator."[177]

Job, thus, makes a complete turnabout: His previous accusations now turn into acceptance of God's justice.

Another Tanhuma discourse demonstrates that the love and pursuit of righteousness earn God's blessing. Thus, David sees himself as God's anointed one because he loved righteousness (Ps. 45:8). Abraham, by his

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[173] *Talpiyot*, in Song of Songs 4:4 ("Like the tower of David is thy neck with *talpiyot*"), is an obscure word that is usually translated as "turrets." The rabbis explain *talpiyot* as though it were composed of two words: *tel* ("hill") and *peniyot* ("turning.")

[174] Cf. *Pisqa* 30:3.

[175] Cf. *Pisqa* 29/30A:7.

[176] Job 29:25.

[177] In *Pisqa* 29/30A:1, God's wings of compassion are said to be greater than the wings of any of His creatures.

actions, showed all Israel the proper way to live, as he learned wisdom (Torah), separated himself from "all the generations that worshiped idols," and loved righteousness to such an extent that he commanded his children that they also perform acts of righteousness. Like David, Abraham's reward was that he was anointed "with the oil of gladness above [his] fellows."

Aaron proved himself deserving of being included among God's chosen because "The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips" (Mal. 2:6).

The discourse thus winds its way back to the speaker of the pericope text, Isaiah. The midrash plays with the ideas of speech and silence, teaching that there is a time for each. Thus, Isaiah spoke up when God was searching for a proper spokesperson, but, when "he saw the seraphim praising the Holy One, blessed be He," he did not join them. Distressed and desolate because of his silence, Isaiah defends himself by saying, "I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips" (Is. 6:5). God takes Isaiah to task for claiming Israel was a people of unclean lips and proceeds to purify Isaiah's lips "with a glowing stone... which [an angel] had taken with tongs from off the altar" (Is. 6:6).[178]

Transformed, Isaiah "began to find righteousness in Israel and to speak in their defense."[179] Therefore, concludes Rabbi Tanhuma, Isaiah was

[178] Fire thus serves a purifying function. Cf. *Pisqa* 26:6.
[179] By extension, Israel is likewise transformed, God's fire enabling it to carry out its mission.

privileged to proclaim "more prophecies of comfort than all the other Prophets," and, moreover, "his prophecies were uttered in double terms.[180]

The midrashist now begins to comfort Israel, first by allaying her fears. The second phrase of the pericope text, "I, even I, am He that comforteth you," is cited: "Who art thou? That thou art afraid of a little man that shall die...." The midrashist explains: "Are you not the daughter of Abraham, the daughter of Isaac, the daughter of Jacob?[181] You are the daughter of the three mountains of the world and yet you are afraid?"[182] Each of the three Patriarchs was saved from his enemy: Abraham from the furnace of Nimrod, Isaac from the Philistines, and Jacob from Esau.[183] The lesson is spelled out: "You, too—whoever comes and engages with you will fall before you."

Israel's complaint, "The oppression of the kingdoms is cruel," is given an eschatological response: "It is because this world is night and they have dominion in it. When morning comes, you will see that they are no more than a worm."[184] The fire of the firefly, symbolizing the oppressor, may be frightening at night; it is no match, however, to the light of the morning in the time-to-come.

The danger associated with excessive fear is that it might lead to hopelessness, which the midrash teaches is cause enough for God's

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[180] Cf. *Pisqa* 29/30A:5. Yet another parallel to that *pisqa* (see also nn. 5 and 7 above), is *Pisqa* 29/30A:2, which discusses the heart's ability to see, speak, know, hear, stand, fall, walk, cry out, be glad, and be comforted. Nine of these are mentioned in *Pisqa* 33:3, with Isaiah's taking responsibility for the tenth—comforting Israel's heart. Isaiah is thus cleverly positioned by Rabbi Tanhuma as not only chief among the prophets (as Job was among his people), but as the one who addresses the heart inside the body (comparable to the Holy of Holies within the Temple in the *petihta*).

[181] The phrasing is reminiscent of the *Avot* section of the *Tefillah*. By establishing the close connection between Israel, God, and the Patriarchs, the midrashist fulfills the task established for him in *Pisqa* 26, namely replacing the missing father-figure.

[182] Cf. *Midrash Tehillim* 87:3: "Rabbi Phineas said in the name of Rabbi Reuben: There will come a time when the Holy One, blessed be He, will bring Sinai, Tabor, and Carmel together, and put Jerusalem on top of them."

[183] In Rabbinic code, Esau symbolizes Rome, the oppressor of their time.

[184] Cf. *Pisqa* 29, which also concerns itself with Israel's despondence and makes frequent use of the night/day motif.

withholding redemption. Such a time occurred during "Israel's plight under Haman, when for a time they were so terrified that they gave up the hope of redemption."[185] However, the Jews are forgiven their excessive fear, since they follow the example set by Jacob, who also feared Esau greatly despite God's promise to be with him.

Still better proof of the inevitability of redemption—despite the loss of hope—lies in the inextricable connection between Creation and Redemption. Jeremiah, reminding Israel of God's oath never to destroy Israel, says: "Thus says the Lord: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath,[186] then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel" (Jer. 31:37). The midrash expounds: "You now see the heavens still in the place and the earth still in its place, and yet you are terrified."[187]

The weakness of Israel's oppressors is illustrated by their sickly inability to hold their food. A quote from the Haftarah for this Sabbath, "He will not die and go down into the pit, for his bread does not fail him" (Is. 51:14), serves to reassure Israel. Further commenting on this Haftarah, the midrash teaches: "In the very next verse, Isaiah alludes to the exodus from Egypt to make you realize that the piece of bread which a man puts into his mouth is as awesome as the exodus from Egypt."

God is the provider of food, God is the Redeemer. As God brings food out of the earth, so God had split the Red Sea to bring Israel out of slavery, and

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[186] It is possible that this reference to Haman is rooted at a time of Persian oppression, "when Persia and Arabia were both world powers," as explained by Bernard J. Bamberger in his article, "A Messianic Document of the Seventh Century," *HUCA*, 15 [1940], pp. 425-37.

[186] Cf. *Pisqa* 32 and the reference to Jerusalem's foundations.

[187] This furthers the motif that the Temple, Israel, the Messiah, and God's right hand are "pawned" (see above, *Pisqa* 31, n. 3). The destruction of the Temple and the sufferings of Israel and the Messiah are *in lieu* of the destruction of the world. This interpretation changes the meaning and purpose of the suffering: It is no longer seen as punishment for the sins of Israel, but as the penance for the sins of the world. This, then, is part of Israel's mission. Cf. Braude, *Pisqa* 37, n. 2.

so, too, will God split the mountain to bring the captives of Israel back to their land.

In a final, abundantly confident lesson taught by Rabbi Samuel bar Nahman, the reader learns that "To maintain a man in his daily bread demands more power than to bring redemption." The earth, after all, was cursed (Gen. 3:17-18); yet God can turn that curse into a blessing. How much easier it will be for God to fulfill the promise of redemption, made in context of Abraham's blessing![188]

The message of hope encased by the motif of food is one found elsewhere in the Midrash. "Hope," as well as "food," are both indicated by the word *sever*. In Genesis Rabbah 91:1, the verse, "When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt" (Gen. 42:1) is interpreted with a play on the word *shever* ("food" but also "break"): "*Shever* — that is the famine; *sever* — that is the abundance of food." It is with this midrash in mind, and also in line with the frequent references to Jacob (a.k.a. Israel) in this section of *Pisqa* 33, that the proof text is Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Menasseh: "The God who fed me all my life long unto this day" (Gen. 48:15).

In the conclusion to this section, with an implied reference to Joseph (the son restored to his father, the ideal feeder–redeemer prototype, and the connection between the Patriarch and his descendants), Isaiah is quoted: "He will not die and go down into the pit, for his bread does not fail him. I [*'Anokhi*] am the Lord" (Is. 51:14-15).

The reversal of Israel's fortune is now nearly complete. Israel lacked bread before and was reduced to looking for grain in animal dung;[189] with Israel

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[188] Gen. 15.

[189] See *Pisqa* 29/30B:3.

redeemed, it will be the oppressors who will be lacking for bread and, even after eating, will not hold their food.

With Israel's faith strengthened, the midrash proceeds to discuss Redemption itself, beginning with a discourse about the Messiah.

The connection between food and the Messiah is made through the use of the Hebrew root *y.tz.a* ("bring out"). As God brings bread out of the earth, so also, "and there came forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse" (Is. 11:1). The midrash now connects the Messiah with Creation, using the word *tehom* ("depths"), common both to the story of creation and Ps. 71:20 ("You... will raise me up from the depths of the earth"). In light of this connection, Gen. 1 is reinterpreted to show that the Messiah was created even before the world. The darkness that preceded light is shown to be the Four Kingdoms (Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Edom/Rome). Edom is also symbolized by the abyss (*tehom*); God's spirit is said to be the Messiah; and, finally, the water is shown to represent *teshuvah*, repentance, which will enable the redemption to take place.[190]

The *pisqa* relates ten examples in which the term *'Anokhi* appears:[191] Three of these relate to the creation of the world; two relate to God's appearing to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob, however, was at first addressed by the lesser form, *'ani*, causing him fear. God redresses the wrong in Gen. 28:15: "And behold, I [*'Anokhi*] am with thee." With the last of the ten uses of the term, God "created the power of speech which [He] put into [Moses'] mouth."[192]

It is through speech that the world was created, that the Israelites were freed from slavery, and that the Ten Commandments were given to them.

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[190] Cf. my analysis of *Pisqa* 29 and particularly n. 4.
[191] See Braude, *Pisqa* 33:8.
[192] This establishes a parallel between Moses and Isaiah. See n. 10 above.

Words—specifically God's words—then, are crucial in the process that will bring about the Messiah. The circle that began with *Pisqa* 26 ("The words of Jeremiah") and *Pisqa* 27 ("Hearken to the word of God") is now nearly complete. The lesson that emerges is that Torah study and the fulfillment of the *mitzvot* are key to redemption. Emphasizing this point, the section concludes with yet one more series of five "*'Anokhi*" citations: God gave the Commandments to Israel, God led the people through the wilderness (symbolizing the Exile); God will rebuild Zion's walls; God will bring the redeemer; and God will comfort Israel.

The redemption of Israel, as seen through the prophecy of Ez.:16, is portrayed as a wedding. In preparation, Israel is first washed with water, cleansed of its blood and anointed with oil. Next, it is clothed with "embroidered garments," sandals of *tahash*,[193] "fine linen... and silk." Israel is then arrayed with five ornaments: Bracelets—interpreted as the two Tables of the Covenant; a chain on the neck—the Torah, a necklace when followed, a yoke when not; a jewel on the forehead—interpreted in *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* as follows:[194] "This is the Sanctuary... Just as most ornaments are suspended from the forehead, so priesthood, Levites, and kingship are from Jacob."

The fourth ornament, "roundels in thine ear" (Ez. 16:12), is interpreted as referring "to the words of the Sanhedrin, for our Masters taught: 'The Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle the way people sit half way around a threshing floor.'"[195]

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[193] "Both R. Eleazar son of R. Jose, and R. Abbahu who cited R. Simeon ben Lakish, said in the name of R. Meir: The *tahash* was created only to supply skins for the Tabernacle and then made to disappear" (*Pisqa* 33:10).

[194] *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* 7:10. "Nose," in Song of Songs 7:5 ("Your nose is as the tower of Lebanon"), is interpreted by Rashi (*ad. loc.*) as "forehead." Braude (p. 650) follows this rendition.

[195] The threshing floor may be recalled as the setting of the night-time encounter between Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 3:5). The reference to the Sanhedrin recalls *Pisqa* 28:1, in which the Sanhedrin is compared to the cords of a tent, and without whose members, "the world cannot endure decently for a moment."

Another interpretation, however, interprets the earrings as the Words of God. Expounding on this explanation, the Rabbis describe Divine Word as a fierce fire that "comes directly from the right hand of the Holy One, blessed be He. Thus it is written, 'From His right hand went a fire of law [*'esh-dat*] for them' (Deut. 33:2)."[196] The Divine Word itself, conclude the Rabbis, is the "roundings [*`agilim*] in thine ears."

In the Rabbinic view, then, God's word represents the tangible connection between God and Israel. As in the previous section of this *pisqa*, hearkening to God's voice—whether spoken directly by God, iterated by Moses and the prophets, reiterated in the Hagiographa, or interpreted by the Rabbis—is the response God expects of Israel. To pursue the analogy of the wedding between God and Israel, God's word is the wedding ring, symbolic of the union between them.

The last ornament with which Israel is arrayed is a crown of glory, which is interpreted as the Divine Presence. This is the visible proof Israel had been asking for, the proof which shows Israel and the nations that Israel is God's chosen people, elevated above its oppressors.

Now that Israel is clothed and bejeweled, it is ready to meet the Bridegroom: God.

The Scroll of Lamentations, an alphabetized listing of Israel's woes, is, as it were, turned on its head in announcing the arrival of the Bridegroom: "How else might I have met thee and in what likenesses have appeared before thee?" (Lam. 2:13). Having previously met with Israel in the form of a cloud over the Tabernacle, at the Red Sea in the form of a man of war, at Sinai as an elder

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[196] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:5.

teaching Torah,[197] in the Tabernacle, God appears now "as a bridegroom entering his nuptial chamber."

Nevertheless, as reality—the Diaspora and the lengthy wait for Redemption—returns, the idyllic vision of a Desert Wedding fades. Mourning (which, the Rabbis had warned in *Pisqa* 29, must always be present in one's mind) returns. As God had once appeared to Israel as a bridegroom, so, after Israel's betrayal, He appeared to the prophets, both to warn Israel and to express His grief. Music ceased in the heavens as in the destroyed Temple.[198] Isaiah 21:3 attests to God's pain, and Jeremiah to the weeping: "My soul shall weep in secret for your pride; and Mine eye shall weep sore and run down with tears" (Jer. 13:17). Deut. 32:18 claims that Israel has "depleted the strength of the Rock that gave thee birth."

Yet, God wishes to console Israel. By custom, God had previously consoled each nation that suffered calamity by comparing it to another. However, Israel has no equal among the nations. Accordingly, explains the *pisqa*, the Ten Tribes and the Tribe of Judah were exiled in different directions, so that they could comfort each other (lending new meaning to the doubling of "comfort ye" in the verse "Comfort ye, comfort ye, My people").

It seems that Israel is puzzled by this twist: They had thought *God* was the comforter! In response, God reiterates His commitment to be Israel's Healer. In the time-to-come, the midrash teaches, "living waters shall go out from Jerusalem."[199] "And these waters will first come into the Great Sea and sweeten it.... And then the Great Sea will go into [the Dead] Sea and heal it." The

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[197] The image is that of a Rabbi.

[198] So in Parma and Prague MSS. Cf. B.T. *Hagigah* 13b: "...Which [wings] were taken away? R. Hananel said that Rab said: Those with which they utter song."

[199] The citation, Zech. 14:8, alludes to the four rivers that emanate from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:10).

analogy is clarified by the midrashist: Just so, "He who can heal the wound of the sea will heal thy wound, O Israel." Spelling out the promise, the *pisqa* quotes the pericope verse: "I, even I, am He that comforteth you."

The *nehemta* acts a summary to the whole *pisqa*, alluding to symbols, themes, and verses that are cited throughout it. God's power is so great, the reader learns, that God can turn the very sin into its own punishment, and that again into healing. Having sinned at brooks (Is. 57:5), the people "were smitten at a brook" (1 K. 18:40), "yet they will be comforted at brooks" (Ez. 47:12). Sinning "upon the tops of the mountains" (Hos. 4:13), their feet were made to "stumble upon the mountains of twilight" (Jer. 13:16); "yet they will be healed upon the mountains, as is said, 'How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger' (Is. 52:7)." The defiled land is made desolate, but is consequently re-espoused. The maiden, bereft of a husband (as a widow), becomes a bride, occasioning the return of joyful music, elders, and priests.

As the culmination of the whole transformation, even the relationship between God and Israel changes:

> They sinned against the one known as "He," for it is written: They have belied the Lord, and said: "It is not He" (Jer. 5:12); and they were smitten by the one known as "He": "But they rebelled, and grieved His holy spirit; therefore He was turned to be their enemy" (Is. 63:10); yet, they will be comforted by the one known as "He": "I, even I, am He that comforteth you."

Concluding the *pisqa*, Rabbi Tanhuma teaches that, when Israel turns wholly towards God, God will turn from an impersonal "He" into a personal, direct "I."

Pisqa 34—Fifth Sabbath of Consolation

Gili me'od, Bat Tzion— "Rejoice Greatly, O daughter of Zion" (Zech. 9:9)

Pisqa'ot 34-37 appear to form a distinct unit within the larger *Tish'ah Be-Av* collection of homilies.[200] They display stylistic traits and a function all their own. Some of these similarities appear already in the four *petihta'ot*, each of which is circular in form, and each of which opens with the formula, "This verse is to be considered in the light of what So-and-so was inspired by the Holy Spirit to say...." Even though other, individual *pisqa'ot* begin with this opening formula, this is the only example of a group of consecutive *pisqa'ot* in which this *petihta* opening is found. This group also differs from other *pisqa'ot* in that *pisqa'ot* 34-37 focus on a Messiah as the embodiment of God's powers of redemption. In three of these—34, 36 and 37—the Messiah's name is said to be Ephraim.[201]

Together, the four *pisqa'ot* serve as a conclusion to the whole *Tish'ah Be-Av* unit. *Pisqa* 34 sets up the arrival of the Messiah; *pisqa'ot* 35-37 paint a glowing picture of the time-to-come, while reviewing many of the motifs that had appeared in earlier *pisqa'ot*.

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[200] Cf. Friedmann's *Introduction*, p. 24. In addition to seeing *Pisqa'ot* 34-37 as a distinct unit, Friedmann believes them to be the earliest material in *Pesiqta Rabbati*. Bamberger, *op. cit.*, p. 428, though also of the opinion that the four "constitute a distinct and distinctive document," dates them to the years "when Persia and Arabia were both world powers," between 632 and 635 C.E.

[201] See Braude, p. 678, n. 5. Bamberger, *op. cit.*, p. 431, describes "Ephraim" as "the hero of the work..., the idealized representative of the 'mourners of Zion.'" For further discussion on Messiah son of Ephraim (or son of Joseph), see J. Heinemann, *'Aggadot*, Ch. 9, pp. 131-41.

Pisqa 34, though seemingly addressed to all Israel, offers special hope and consolation to a specific group of Jews who called themselves *Avelei Tzion*—The Mourners of Zion.[202] This group (or groups) of ascetic Jews were "devoted to mourning the destruction of the Temple and to praying for the redemption of Zion."[203]

Referring to God's arm,[204] the midrashist draws on the common root of the words "arm" and "seed" (*z.r.'a*) to draw a connection between the Messiah and the Mourners of Zion.[205] The Mourners' goal is to speed the coming of the Messiah through fasting, prayer (especially in the morning),[206] and through suffering (especially their "great distress because it was children of Israel who both mocked and scorned them"). When the Messiah, representing God's right hand, arrives, he will be as the bread that is brought out of the ground (from seed) by God.[207]

The year preceding the coming of the Messiah is said to be full of catastrophe, and the scoffers and mockers will find "that they will have faces as black as the bottom of a pot."[208] Punished with famine, the righteous among them will remove their *tefillin* (as the repentant Israelites had removed their jewelry in

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[202] Though structurally, this *pisqa* serves to set up the arrival of the Messiah, and as such is a successful introduction to the climax of the Tish`ah Be-'Av *pisqa'ot*, the centrality of *Avelei Tzion* in it is somewhat puzzling. Though *Pisqa* 29 justifies having "always in memory the destruction of the Temple," the *halakhic* response offered in *Pisqa* 31 allows a more normal way of life than that practiced by the ascetics (and can possibly be interpreted as rebuking their practices). Cf. B.T. *Baba Batra* 60b, where R. Joshua ben Hananiah gently reproaches a group of people who "became ascetics, binding themselves neither to eat meat nor to drink wine."

[203] *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 3, p. 946, s.v. "Avelei Zion."

[204] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:5-6.

[205] The connection between זרוע—"arm"—and זרע—"seed"—is also found in Midrash *Tanhuma* (*Ha-Nidpas*) *Vayeshev* 9, and in Genesis Rabbah 87:7, where it is applied to Joseph, the prototype of the Messiah. The use of this symbol at this point is not coincidental.

[206] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:2, the description of those who worshipped Venus or the Morning Star.

[207] Cf. *Pisqa* 33:5, the comparison between bread and the Exodus, and *Pisqa* 33:6, where the verse "Thou wilt... bring me up again from the depths of the earth" (Ps. 71:20) is interpreted as depicting the Messiah.

[208] Cf. *Pisqa* 26:5 (Ebed-Melech, the Cushite); also *Pisqa* 28:1.

the desert), and compare themselves to sheep gone astray.[209] Justifying the actions of the Mourners, God will then kiss them and "put back the garland upon them."

Pointedly, the *pisqa* teaches that the knowledge of Torah is necessary for salvation, but that "he who believes implicitly in the Messiah from the very first year of the seven-year period will have his reward multiplied many times over." At the time of Redemption, all Israel will admit their sin in having mocked the Mourners of Zion, and, finally "possessed of God's wisdom... all Israel will be like kings." However, those who do not admit their guilt, will be less pleasing to God. The midrash criticizes those who are obedient to the Torah, yet who "wait only upon My Torah—[but not] for My Kingship."[210] To be truly deserving of redemption, one must have anticipated the Messiah—indeed "avowed their need of him"—while silently and humbly accepting the abuse of the rest of Israel and the other nations.

Like the Mourners of Zion, the Messiah has been confined and "afflicted" (*`ani*).[211] The donkey[212] on which he will be riding represents "the wicked who have no merit of their own and can manage to get along only by resorting to the merit of their fathers."[213] The *nehemta* reassures that, along with the righteous,

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[209] Cf. the pericope text of *Pisqa* 26.

[210] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:5, which states only: "If you need Me to bring the time of redemption, I need you to keep My Torah."

[211] Cf. *Pisqa* 32: "***`Aniyah So-`arah***."

[212] In *Pisqa* 31:7, Israel is compared to the over-burdened beast of Ex. 23:5—a donkey. However, in Yalkut Shimoni, Vol. 1, 146, Joseph refers to Potiphar's wife as בת חמורים –"daughter of donkeys," citing Ez. 23:20. And in Tanhuma *Ha-Nidpas Vayera* 23, Abraham slyly compares his servant boys to a donkey. In light of these conflicting meanings of the symbol, subtle, and not very kindly, criticism of Israel is displayed by the author of this midrash. For further discussion of the symbol, see Joseph Heinemann, *'Aggadot* , pp. 122-9.

[213] See my discussion of *Pisqa* 30, n. 9.

even that beast of burden will be redeemed.[214] Citing Jer. 31:9, the redeemed are shown returning to their land "with weeping.... I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way wherein they shall not stumble; for I am become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born." The cycle of redemption will be completed as God then will clothe the Messiah's detractors "with shame, while on him ['and also upon those who are at one with him'] his crown shall sparkle" (Ps. 132:18).

[214] Bamberger (*op. cit.* p. 429), offers his opinion that "the peculiar messianology of our material reflects unmistakable Christian influence." Braude (p. 678, n. 5), citing *Pisqa'ot* 31 and 37, disagrees: "I am inclined to believe that the idea of the suffering Messiah may be native Jewish tradition." However, the idea that the Messiah will redeem the entire world seems to be different from the earlier beliefs that he will redeem the just only. It may show the Christian influence that Bamberger refers to, or it may be a combination of messianic and prophetic ideals—it is through Jonah, after all, that Nineveh is spared.

Pisqa 35—Sixth Sabbath of Consolation

Ronî ve-simḥî, Bat Tzion— "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion" (Zech. 2:14)

The Haftarah pericope is examined through the lens of a verse from Song of Songs: "A people like a wall—we will build upon her a turret of silver; or a people like a door—we will frame her with boards of cedar" (Song of Songs 8:9). Despite the midrashist's claim that Solomon meant to praise Israel, the verse actually contains an inherent caution. With Israel in the Diaspora, will the nation be like a wall, protective of its identity and customs, in which case it will be ornamented with silver? Or will it be like a door, letting in strange and foreign influences and necessitating reinforcement with planks of cedar wood?[215]

Israel's existence in the Diaspora is questioned by the midrashist; then, possibly in admission of its inevitability, the Diaspora is rationalized and even justified. The Second Temple, the reader is told, did not contain the Divine Presence. Two reasons are examined. The first is that not all the Israelites had returned to their land following the end of the Babylonian exile; the Temple structure reflected this weakened condition, occasioning some people—those who had seen the First Temple in its grandeur—to weep, while others, who had never seen the First Temple, sang with joy. Rabbi Isaac, however, counters this reason with one of his own. According to him, the fault cannot lie with the

[215] Cf. Genesis Rabba 39:3: "If as a wall...: If [Israel] fulfills the commandments, it will be built up; if as a door (*delet*) ....: If it is poor (*dal*) in righteousness and deeds of kindness, it will be reinforced [a play on the word *nitzor*, also indicating troubles] with boards of cedar." Cf. also Song of songs Rabbah VIII:9:1-2.

building put up by "the exiled children of Israel."[216] The true reason for the absence of the Divine Presence is that the Temple was built by Cyrus, the Persian king, a descendant of Japheth, of whom it was said, "God shall enlarge Japheth, but He shall dwell in the tents of Shem (Gen. 9:27).[217] The people are thus absolved and even praised for their effort, despite its being doomed to fail. The exile, in Rabbi Isaac's mind, is an accepted fact. The midrash accepts it, too, and it proceeds to the real question, also from a book of Solomon: "A woman of valor who can find?" (Prov. 31:10).

On the line is Israel's faithfulness to God, an issue which is put to words by the ministering angels: "Master of the universe, if Israel, when they dwelt in their own Land, cleaved to idols, how much more and more will they do so now that Thou exilest them among the nations of the world!"

God's response is wholehearted faith in Israel's steadfastness. Moreover, "they will not deem it enough to give themselves over wholly, but they will also bring others near to dwell under My wings."[218] God's certainty is based on Israel's ability to withstand the many punishments it had undergone. Unlike Egypt, which collapsed after ten plagues, and unlike Babylon, whose palaces were razed (*'oreru*)[219] by the Assyrians, Israel emerges strengthened from each of its trials. "Even in the moment of their anguish at the hands of the unutterably wicked, they speak of Me as 'He who is righteous." Never questioning God's justice, Israel blames only itself: "But in truth, we have sinned. We have committed crimes, we have done what is wrong, we have transgressed, we

[216] "*Benai ha-golah*" — "children of the exile." Implied in this phrase is praise: Even though they lived in the exile, the Children of Israel supported the community in Israel, even helping with the building of the Temple.
[217] This disparagement of Persia occurs frequently in *Pisqa'ot* 34-37. See *Pisqa* 36:2, which claims that "the king of Persia will again lay the whole world waste;" see also *Pisqa* 37:1, which speaks "particularly against the wicked Persians."
[218] The motif of wings, representing God's compassion and protection, appears in *Pisqa* 29/30A:1.
[219] Cf. *Pisqa* 32:2.

have revolted, we have rebelled. We have turned aside from Thy commandments and ordinances."

The implied accusation of Israel made at the beginning of the *pisqa* (weakness due to division and exile) is thus answered: Israel is not divided (as a gate, consisting of two doors);[220] rather, it is unified, like a wall that deserves to be ornamented.

As equal counterpart to Israel, so God now becomes as a wall of fire around Israel, providing her both with security and with the image of a crown. To the righteous inside that wall, the fire will offer protection, warmth, and delight. Those who wish to enter for the sake of God (proselytes), will be welcome. However, those who attack Israel will be consumed by the fire, just as was Sennacherib's entire camp.[221]

The accusation, leveled at the beginning of this *pisqa*, that the Divine Presence did not dwell inside the Second Temple, is countered at this point by God's presence descending from the heavens as, "on account of [the excellence of] Israel, the Holy One, blessed be He, brings His presence down from the heavens on high and causes it to dwell on the earth."

The *pisqa* now returns to its haftarah pericope, "Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion; for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee" (Zech. 2:14). The time of singing will be the time of Israel's redemption, announced first by Elijah, who, three days before the Messiah comes, will "stand upon the mountains of Israel, and weep and lament upon them."[222] On the next day, Elijah will announce, "Good has come to the world." On the third day, "he will come and say, 'Salvation has come to the world." At the misapprehension by the

[220] But cf. *Pisqa* 32 and the gate hewn out of one gem.
[221] See B.T. *Sanhedrin* 95b.
[222] Cf. *Pisqa* 33:4. See also n. 12 in my analysis of that *pisqa*.

nations of the world, thinking that these words were meant for them, he will add, "Unto Zion, thy God reigneth" (Is. 52:7). At that point, God will appear in "all His glory and His kingship" and, in view of all the inhabitants of the world, He will redeem Israel.

Pisqa 36—Seventh Sabbath of Consolation

Qumi, 'ori — "Arise, shine" (Is. 60:1-2)

Many of the motifs that appear throughout the *pisqa'ot* of *Tish'ah Be-Av* are present already in the *haftarah* for the seventh Sabbath of Consolation, Is. 60:1-22. This exalted prophecy opens with the motifs of rising and shining (the verb construction—***'ori*** — indicating that what is meant is not shining in the sense of reflecting someone else's light, but rather being an active source of light, like Ruth, who, redeemed, becomes a source of redemption).[223] Israel's light will outshine that of the moon and the sun. The other nations, however, will find themselves surrounded by darkness, as Egypt was before the Exodus. The reversal in Israel's fortune becomes clear, as kings who had previously ruled over Israel now walk behind it, in its light.

Isaiah tells Israel to "raise your eyes and look about." Hope, symbolized by the action of looking up, turns to reality as that which has not been clear before becomes abundantly apparent: The return of Israel's sons and daughters (reunification of the family) and the downfall of Israel's enemies. "The wealth of the sea shall pass on to you" recalls *Pisqa* 32 and the gems that lie at the sea floor; though the literal reference is probably to the wealth of the sea-coast nations (including Greece and Rome, two of the nations that had plundered Israel), the verse also brings to mind the gifts that the Egyptian people bestowed upon the Israelites during the Exodus.

"The flocks of Kedar shall be assembled to you" (Is. 60:7) recalls the motif of "flock," symbolic of Israel—rebellious in *Pisqa* 26, lovingly herded in the Song of Songs.

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[223] *Pisqa* 29/30A:1.

Israel's walls—representing identity and recognition—will be rebuilt by those who had razed them, as God's anger turns to compassion for His people. The gates, whose function is to protect and filter what goes into the city and what leaves it, will remain open day and night (in itself a motif, symbolizing God's constancy). In fact, as the moon and sun stop setting,[224] night itself will disappear, and a world that is all-light will dawn. God's plant will become a glorified orchard, as the youngest and smallest shoot becomes a great nation once again.

Pisqa 36 speaks of God as a "fountain of life" and as a source of light. The Torah, which is also spoken of as "fountain of life," thus symbolizes God; immersing oneself in Torah is equivalent to purifying oneself in a ritual bath and will result in the enjoyment of God's light in the time-to-come.[225] This latter light is "the light of the Messiah," the light of Redemption and also the light of Creation.

Beholding the Messiah, Satan is thoroughly shaken, realizing that "Surely, this is the Messiah who will cause me and all the... princes of the earth's nations to be swallowed up in Gehenna."[226] Identifying the Messiah by name,[227] God promises that his function will be to "pull himself up straight and... pull up straight his generations,[228] and [to] give light to the eyes of Israel and deliver his people." The Messiah represents God's right hand, which, as in the Exodus, will stop the flow of rivers and seas in order to let the Israelites return to their homeland.

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[224] Recalling Joshua's victory over the Emorites at Gibeon (Josh. 10:12-13).
[225] See the discussion, in *Pisqa* 29, of abstaining from the ritual bath as a sign of mourning.
[226] In *Pisqa* 31:10, the Ten Tribes of Israel are said to have been "swallowed up in Rivla." In *Pisqa* 32:3/4, the jewels, source of light for the rebuilt Jerusalem, are dropped and buried. In *Pisqa* 33:6: "Thou... [who] hast made me to see many and sore troubles, wilt... bring me up again from the depths of the earth."
[227] Cf. *Pisqa* 32:1.
[228] Cf. *Pisqa* 31:9

The Messiah is told he will suffer many woes; however, he agrees to be God's messenger as long as redemption will be extended "not only [to] those who are alive..., but those who are dead, who died from the days of Adam up to the time of redemption, [including] abortions."[229]

Some people will yet conspire against the Messiah,[230] but God will come to his protection, threatening the conspirators with the very "firebrands with which you would be girded." None from Israel, however, will be harmed, as to them God's fire will appear as light with which to see.

Nevertheless, during the seven years preceding the coming of the Messiah, the sufferings of the Messiah (and of Israel) will become almost unendurable. God reassures the Messiah that the sufferings and exile Israel is enduring are matched by those of God. The Messiah is reconciled, "content to be like his Master."[231]

This time of trouble will conclude as God speaks to Israel and says, "Rise up, My love, My fair one, and come away..." while Israel replies: "My Beloved is to be with me, and I am to be with Him" (Song of Songs 2:10, 16). The nations of the earth, however, "will fall upon their faces, and they will be seized with pangs like the pangs of a woman in labor." Fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy, these nations will walk behind enlightened Israel as servants behind their masters.[232]

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[229] Cf. *Pisqa* 29/30A:10, in which Isaiah extracts a similar promise before agreeing to serve as God's spokesperson. See above, my discussion of that *pisqa*, n. 22.

[230] Recalling Doeg and Ahithophel in *Pisqa* 32:10.

[231] The servant-master relationship, explored in other *pisqa'ot* (e.g. *Pisqa'ot* 26, 27, 29/30), is thus repaired, closing another circle that began with a tear in rightful relationships.

[232] See Braude, p. 683 n. 16, for his explanation of this phrase.

Pisqa 37 (for Shabbat Va-Yelekh)[233]

Sos 'asis— "Rejoicing I will rejoice" (Is. 61:10)

This *pisqa* forms the joyful conclusion and climax to the *Pisqa'ot* of Mourning and Consolation. The reversal of Israel's misfortune is made clear from the pericope of the *petiḥta* : "Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and will make them rejoice from their sorrow" (Jer. 31:13). The symbol of the virgin is the counterpart of that of the widow.[234] The closing of the gap between the generations, "the young men and the old together," may be interpreted as the reunification of the dysfunctional family, one of the goals of the midrashist.[235] The gap between the living and the dead, past and future, also will be closed, as the Patriarchs will arise to proclaim that Ephraim, the Messiah, despite being their progeny, is greater than they because of the suffering he had taken upon himself:

> For the sake of Israel thou didst become a laughingstock and a derision among the nations of the earth; and didst sit in darkness..., and thine eyes saw no light, and thy skin cleaved to thy bones, and thy body was as dry as a piece of wood; and thine eyes grew dim from fasting, and thy strength was dried up like a potsherd.[236]

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[233] [233] According to Tosafot in B.T. *Megillah* 31b, s.v. ראש , Is. 61:10–63:9 is the *haftarah* reading for Shabbat *Va-yelekh*, the Seventh Sabbath of Consolation. This corresponds with the order of *haftarot* in *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana*, and also in the *piyyut*, "*U-vechein zechor meh hayah lanu*" by Eleazar Kallir (in Ezra Fleisher, "*Luaḥ Mo'adei Ha-shanah Be-fiyyut le-Rabbi Eleazar Berabbi Killir*," in *Tarbiz* 52 [1982-83], pp. 223-272). According to Friedmann (*Pisqa* 37, n. 1), this *haftarah*, though in any case the last of the Consolation *Haftarot*, is read on Shabbat *Va-yelekh* when Rosh Ha-Shanah fell on a Monday and a Tuesday. However, in years when *Parshiyot Nitzavim* and *Va-yelekh* were joined, this *haftarah* was read while one of the previous ones was omitted.

[234] Lam. 1:1, Jer. 31:4. Cf. *Pisqa* 26:6, which describes the death of "the virgins who wove the curtain for the Sanctuary."

[235] See my analysis of *pisqa 26*.

[236] *Pisqa* 37:1.

Despite imprisonment (suffered also by the Messiah's prototype, Joseph), the Messiah shows no bitterness toward Israel (like Joseph toward his brothers).

God then will free the Messiah from his confinement and "will lift [him] up to the heaven of heavens" (equivalent with the earthly counterpart, the Holy of Holies). There, the Messiah will be cloaked "in something of the splendor of His own glory as protection against the nations of the earth," especially the wicked Persians. Referring to the Messiah as "Ephraim is a darling son unto Me," (words spoken of Israel in Jer. 31:20), God will extend His mercy to him. God "will make seven canopies of precious stones and pearls for him." Out of each canopy, as from the Garden of Eden, will flow four rivers –one each of wine, honey, milk, and balsam.[237] As in a wedding, God will then embrace the Messiah and bring him into the canopy, while all the righteous, pious, holy and mighty men of Torah will gaze upon him as witnesses.

God will then call upon the north and south winds and command them to sprinkle spices before Ephraim, and the Messiah will "come into his garden and eat its pleasant fruits" (Song of Songs 4:16). The pericope of the *petihta* returns to complete the rejoicing.

The pericope text from the *haftarah, Sos 'asis*— "rejoicing, I will rejoice" (Is. 61:10), is shown as the counterpart to *Bakho tivkeh ba-llayla* — "Weeping, she weeps in the night" (Lam. 1:2). The double consolation (as in "Comfort ye, comfort ye"), appears several times: In this world, Israel will rejoice at "the downfall of wicked Rome;" in the world to come, at the downfall of Gog and Magog. Israel first will rejoice when it is delivered from punishment in Gehenna,

[237] Each of these liquids is symbolic. Wine is a symbol of rejoicing (cf. Eccles.10:19); milk is a staple in an agrarian society and is, along with honey, symbolic of the Land of Israel; honey represents strength (cf. Jonathan in 1 Sam. 14:27, and Samson, Jud. 14:14). In Genesis Rabbah 39:2, Abraham is compared to balsam.

then when the "Inclination to evil will have been routed out of Israel." "Rejoicing" refers to the time when the angel of death will have been removed from Israel's midst; "I will rejoice" refers to the days of the Messiah."[238]

Salvation is interpreted as clothing. Since the creation of the world until the ultimate subjugation of Edom, God has clothed Himself with seven garments (paralleling the seven canopies into which the Messiah was led): Glory and majesty at creation; grandeur at the Red Sea; strength at Sinai; vengeance "when He requited the Chaldeans;" a white garment for forgiving the iniquities of Israel; righteousness at the time of the coming of the Messiah; and finally, when requiting Edom, God puts on red apparel.

The Messiah, too, is covered with symbolic clothing—a garment of endless light by which Israel is enabled to see.[239]

As counterpart to Jeremiah's cursing the day he was born,[240] Israel will bless the hour in which the Messiah was born and "the womb whence he came." With all its body parts healed,[241] Israel will bless "the eye which longed for him whose lips open with blessing and peace, whose speech is pure delight, whose heart meditates in trust and tranquility." Doubling that blessing, the midrashist exclaims: "Blessed is the eye which merits seeing him, the utterance of whose tongue is pardon and forgiveness for Israel, whose prayer is a sweet savor, whose supplication is purity and holiness."

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[238] The extension of Redemption into the infinite future is important. Longing for the kind of redemption symbolized by the union of God and Israel, which has proven so long in coming, could become an exercise in frustration. Additionally, this extension will become important when the Diaspora *does* end. In both cases, whether through frustration or satisfaction, with longing for God no longer there, the Rabbis' labor of love will have become pointless. With the vision of faith extended almost infinitely, Judaism can survive.

[239] Words actually spoken of God: "You are... wrapped in a robe of light" (Ps. 104:2).

[240] See *Pisqa* 26.

[241] See *Pisqa* 33:13.

Finally, all Israel is blessed as the forbears of the Messiah—who is "hidden for the eternity [-to-come]."

The final question of the skeptic can at last be answered: After all Israel's troubles, will Israel, now the bride whose jewels—her merits—earn her the fascination of the world, ever have to go back to her previous condition as slave? The answer is, of course, a resounding, "No! Scripture says: 'And the ransomed of the Lord...[242] shall come with singing unto Zion... and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads' (Is. 33:10, 51:11)."

[242] That is, released from pawn.

Part Three:

Ideas and Motifs Appearing in the *Pisqa'ot* of Tish`ah be-'Av

Interwoven into the fabric of the *pisqa'ot* that comprise this collection is a series of ideas and motifs, whose purpose it is to unify the separate chapters into a collective whole. Some of the motifs are interrelated or can be considered as different forms of the same motif: So, for example, various liquids— wine, milk, nectar, rivers, seas, and tears—can be seen as forms of water. That the forms—or their effect—can change, while yet keeping their essential matter, is in itself an idea that the rabbis use. Water can thus give life or take it. The rivers of Egypt and Babylon, sources of life for the civilizations that grew around them, are poisonous to Israel; so, too, the nations' persecution of the Jews is compared to a torrential flood. However, fresh water will emanate from under the foundations of the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem, flow into the Great Sea (the Mediterranean) and sweeten it, then flow into the Dead Sea and heal (resurrect) it.

Since ritual purification through water was a necessary component of the Temple ritual, it could be said that, with the Temple destroyed, there was no way to keep alive the connection between God and Israel. The midrash refutes this argument, claiming that mourning, represented by tears and by refraining from taking the ritual bath, serve the purpose of maintaining that connection.

Fire, as a symbol, undergoes a similar treatment. In *Pisqa'ot* 26, 27, and 29, fire is the vehicle for God's punishment. The fire that burns the Temple is said to be set by angels, not by the Chaldeans. Fire becomes a purifying element even as it destroys: The virgins whose task it was to weave the curtains for the Temple, upon seeing the Temple in flames, leap into the fire, demonstrating their devotion to God (and establishing a precedent for *Qiddush*

ha-Shem, martyrdom). Fire purifies Isaiah's lips so he can become a prophet for God and a spokesman for Israel.

Additionally, however, fire symbolizes God's power to protect Israel, taking the form of a wall that surrounds them, destroys all enemies (Egypt and Assyria in particular), but yet lets in converts. In the messianic *pisqa'ot* 34-37, fire appears as God's judgment, burning guilty sinners in Gehenna (hell).

Even as it surrounds Israel, so fire is inside each human being. Taking the gentler form of a candle, it symbolizes the human soul, the eternal connection between God and humanity. In this form, fire offers warmth, delighting those who bask in it.

Most importantly, fire is a source of light. In the *pisqa'ot* of consolation, fire is connected to the light of creation as well as the light of redemption. It is called the light hidden for the righteous, and the light of the Messiah, both created before the world came into being and hidden until the time-to-come. The Torah is described as a "fountain of light," connecting the two symbols of water and fire; by immersing oneself in this fountain, Israel is enabled to see God's light—and then itself become a light unto the nations.

Seeing (often symbolized by the use of the word "eye" or "eyes"), is also an important motif that appears in the *pisqa'ot.* It actually connects to a much larger issue, one that is not mentioned outright in this midrash, but that underlies much of it. That issue is Israel's special ability to perceive God, an ability that other nations do not have.[243] Thus, perception, in all its forms and

[243] Joseph Heinemann, in his *'Aggadot,* p. 123, writes: "An idea considered important by the Rabbis is that... Abraham and his descendants were granted special abilities not given to the rest of humanity: To perceive God—theophany.... In this *derasha*... appears the motif of "seeing" as a special ability given to the seed of Abraham, in sharp contrast to the nations. This motif—that Israel is a nation that sees God... is an ancient one. Philo of Alexandria (first century C.E.) already uses it in a sermon on the name 'Israel,' according to which the name means *Ish ro`eh 'El* ('a man who sees God')."

guises, is a motif that occurs frequently. The ability to see while others are in the dark recalls the ninth plague of Egypt, but it is connected to redemption through Isaiah's prophecy: "Arise, shine, for your light has dawned;... Behold! Darkness shall cover the earth, and thick clouds the peoples" (Is. 60:1-2).

Related to seeing is the idea that outward appearance is not identical with reality. The colors white and black, symbolizing innocence and guilt, are not always what they seem. The faithful servant who saves Jeremiah from Zedekiah's henchmen is Ebed-Melech, the Cushite—the African, whose skin is black. Those among Israel who mock the Mourners of Zion will find themselves "with faces black as the bottom of a pot" (blackened with fire) when they find out who was right and who was wrong. In *Pisqa* 29/30B, the reader encounters a young woman named Miriam, whose haughtiness prior to the destruction of Jerusalem is matched by her present lowly condition, digging for grains of barley in animal dung. The name recalls Moses' sister, who was bitter over Moses' choice of a black woman as wife and was struck by leprosy in punishment.

Identity and role, those aspects of a person that make others recognize him or her, appear often in the *pisqa'ot*. In *Pisqa* 26, for example, Jeremiah, God's truthful prophet, encounters false prophets who accuse him of treason. Nebuchadnezzar, the mighty king of the Babylonian empire, becomes God's servant—chosen because Israel had refused to serve God. In *Pisqa* 32, David bitterly lashes out at his detractors for not addressing him by his rightful name. In *Pisqa'ot* 34, 36 and 37, on the other hand, God calls the Messiah by his name, Ephraim.

Israel, as a whole, is perceived by the nations to have been abandoned by God. The truth is that Israel can see that which other nations cannot.[244] Israel expresses its bitterness toward Father Abraham, who cannot see past the barren mountain, symbolic of Israel's forlorn condition. However, Israel's perception of itself is also shown to be wrong: In *Pisqa* 27 it sees itself as dry and lifeless bones. However, the power to resurrect the dead is God's, as Ezekiel proves. Israel sees itself "as a widow," its legal status and fate unclear. In reality, however, whether abandoned, cast out, or even abused by her husband, the relationship between Israel and God is never severed.

If clothes make the man, then the Temple—in the form of tent, curtains, or canopy—represent God's garments, by which God's presence on earth becomes apparent. The Sanhedrin, the rabbinic court, is identified with the cords of God's tent; their work—calculating the calendar and determining Jewish law (*halakhah*)—imbues the world with worth and value. The seven garments of God, described in *Pisqa* 37, are matched by the seven canopies into which the Messiah is led. These canopies are studded with jewels, by which a bride is made apparent to the world. Jewels, sign of wealth and riches (both real and symbolic, representing goodness and wisdom), also emit light. The jewels that will stud the walls of the rebuilt Jerusalem are so brilliant—filled with messianic light—that they have to be hidden at the bottom of the sea and can be shown to a righteous and humble rabbi only in the depths of a cave.

Torah is said to be a valuable ornament, a gold necklace given by God to Israel as a sign of paternal love. When Israel rejects the Torah, it becomes a yoke of iron on their shoulders, so heavy that it bends their bodies. (It will be the Messiah's duty to straighten himself as well as others when he redeems the

[244] See my discussion in *Pisqa* 34, n. 13.

world). The gold necklace is made up of the letters of the Torah. When Israel rejects it, the letters are reshaped into an acrostic of suffering and lamentation (the Scroll of Lamentations). When Israel is redeemed, however, her merits will be her jewels, restoring Israel's pride and shaming her adversaries.

The Torah, as God's words, necessitates hearing and hearkening. This action is a motif that appears in many of the *pisqa'ot*, particularly those of admonition. *Pisqa* 26 is based on Jer. 1, which opens with "The words of Jeremiah." His words of warning are not heeded by Israel, symbolic of the nation's attitude to all the words of God. Jeremiah warns further: "Hear ye the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel" (Jer. 2:4). Israel's continued refusal results in her destruction, and in Israel's having to hear those words while in the state of "as though dead" (Ezekiel's prophecy to the dead bones). However, when Israel is redeemed, God's word will be as earrings on Israel's ear, a jewel giving off not light but sound—not the sound of warning, but a sound of delight.

Silence and sound occur intermittently in these *pisqa'ot.* What is not spoken but is yet heard throughout them is the questioning of God's justice. Is God's punishment of Israel's sins too severe? Job, in his role as judge and officer, makes inquiry when a case is not immediately clear. Before the destruction by fire of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham questions God's system of justice. Jeremiah, at first, refuses to be God's spokesman of doom and destruction to Israel. Isaiah, who had kept quiet and not joined the angels in their praise of God, is chosen to speak double words of comfort to Israel. Other prophets, however, are rejected as comforters, because they had also brought

words of destruction to Israel. (Jeremiah is different in this respect, since, like Moses, Isaiah, and Elijah, he speaks to God in defense of Israel).

The midrash answers the question of God's justice by telling two father-son stories; in the first, a weak-willed father offers his Torah-studying son as a sacrifice to an idol. In the second story, a righteously angry father banishes his wayward son from the house. In light of Ex. 21:15, which ordains death as the punishment for the rebellious and wayward son, the latter story better exemplifies God's justice, which is actually tempered with mercy.

Speaking, as a motif, is developed further. *Pisqa* 36 begins with a spoken dialogue between God and Satan, then continues with another dialogue between God and the Messiah. In *Pisqa* 29/30A, Boaz speaks words of comfort to Ruth, anticipating the words of comfort that will be spoken by God to Israel at the time of Redemption.

Speech—particularly God's words—is thus made the equivalent of comforting and consolation. In a literary *coup*, the midrash itself, the exploration of the meaning of God's word, is seen as consolation, and the *darshan*, the one who expounds that word—the teacher, the rabbi—becomes the one who comforts and consoles.[245] It is the study and observance of Torah—God's word—that will bring redemption into the world.

On a fast day such as Tish`ah be-'Av, it is natural to speak of food. Eight of the *pisqa'ot* use that motif at least once. Food is understood not only as a sign of God's blessing, but even as a miracle. "To maintain a man in his daily bread demands more power than to give redemption," states *Pisqa* 33. Food is symbolic of birth, as of creation. As birth (itself symbolic of redemption) requires a tear or a breach (of the sea or of a mountain, in the case of a whole people),

[245] See my analysis of *Pisqa* 32, n. 18.

so grain must force its way out of the ground, splitting it as the stalk rises. Famine is God's way of punishing sinners, mockers and scoffers. As symbol of God's redemptive powers, the Land of Israel's richest harvests occur in the year before Israel's entry into the land, and in the year following its exile. The redemption of Ruth by Boaz, an act that will transform the widow into a wife, a woman bereft of children into a mother, and also an act that will engender the future redemption of all Israel, is set against such a plentiful harvest. The Messiah is portrayed as a small off-shoot that will grow into a veritable vineyard. Orchards, vineyards and fields of grain abound in *Pisqa'ot* 29/30A–37, the *pisqa'ot* of redemption and consolation.

The relationship between God and Israel, one of the key concerns of the midrash, is explored through four types of relationships: Master and servant, teacher and disciple, husband and wife, and parent and child. Analysis of the frequency in which these types appear in the *pisqa'ot* yields an interesting result. The parent-child relationship appears in a total of ten *pisqa'ot* , four times in the homilies of admonition and six times in those of consolation. The master-servant relationship appears eight times, all but three of these in the admonition *pisqa'ot*. Four teacher-disciple examples occur, three of these in the consolation *pisqa'ot*. And finally, four husband-wife examples occur, all in the consolation homilies. The more complete union represented by that last relationship is the one that is favored by the midrashist.

Numbers and numerology, always a good source of inspiration for the midrashist, are found frequently in their magical or symbolic guises in this collection. The numbers three and seven (as in the three Patriarchs, or the seven canopies the Messiah enters) appear several times, both within single homilies and in their over-arching arrangement (as in the number and

organization of *pisqa'ot* in the collection).[246] Ten is a favorite number, probably because it is connected with the Ten Commandments. Zedekiah, tells the midrash, had ten sons; God made ten steps during His withdrawal from the Holy of Holies and Jerusalem; and the heart has ten capabilities.[247]

The number five is used symbolically to show half as much as God's power (as the five creatures of God that are spoken of as having wings).[248] It is possible also to interpret this number as the equivalent of God's Hand, or God's right Hand, which plays a prominent role in the Exodus, in the punishment of Israel, and in its redemption.[249] During the exile, God's hand is said to be "held in pawn,"[250] mirroring the Temple and, by extension, Israel's condition. *Pisqa* 36 offers proof that the Messiah, as the embodiment of God's power to redeem, is comparable to God's right Hand: "And even seas and rivers will [yield to his power and] stop flowing, as is said, '*I will set his hand also on the sea, and his right hand on the rivers* (Ps. 89:26).'"

These, then, are some of the motifs and ideas that weave the fabric of the Tish`ah Be-'Av *pisqa'ot* into a single unit. Further study of this midrashic material will probably yield greater intricacies and correlations, and probably additional motifs as well. To what extent they show the hand of a single redactor is not clear. It is probable that the dense layering of motifs and symbols is the result of the process of evolution by which this collection was formed. In that case, what emerges is a midrashic *mind* or thought process that, like these *pisqa'ot* , combines the work of many and makes it one.

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[246] Rivka Ulmer, in her *Synoptic Edition* , speaks of these devices as "micro- and macro forms" (*Introduction*, p. xxv).
[247] See *Pisqa* 29/30A:2.
[248] See *Pisqa* 29/30A:1.
[249] See *Pisqa* 33:13, which cites Is. 40:2 to show God's Hand in the punishment of Israel, and Is. 11:11, which shows God's Hand in Israel's redemption.
[250] *Pisqa* 31:5.

Part Four: Conclusion

In this thesis, I attempted to analyze those *pisqa'ot* in Midrash *Pesiqta Rabbati* that were intended for the three Sabbaths of Mourning and Admonition that precede Tish`ah be-'Av, for the day of mourning itself, and for the seven Sabbaths of Consolation following it. The focus of my analysis was on the symbols, motifs and issues that weave through the *pisqa'ot* . The goal was to discern a redactor's hand, if present, unifying the single units into a larger whole.

Symbols and motifs of mourning abound in ancient Jewish literature. The Scroll of Lamentations, Psalm 137, the liturgical material such as the Yom Kippur Martyrology and the *piyyutim* found in the *Seder Qinnot for Tish`ah be- 'Av*, as well as other sources, teem with examples of mourning behavior and language. Likewise, the Book of Psalms and the prophecy of Isaiah are filled with expressions of rejoicing and exalted visions of God's redemption of Israel. Armed with the prior knowledge that the *pisqa'ot* of *Pesiqta Rabbati* are based on texts such as these, I expected to find the same motifs and symbols.

I also expected to find a certain amount of redactional evidence rooted in *gimmatriya*, or numerology. The systemization of the processes of mourning and consolation into two periods, one of of three Sabbaths and the other other of seven, indicated, from the very outset of my analysis, that the author of *Pesiqta Rabbati* was using models that were familiar to Jewish congregations.

My expectation was to find a gradual intensification in the expression of grief during the period of three Sabbaths of Mourning, culminating in the fast of Tish`ah be-'Av, and an incremental revivification in the seven-week period following it.

My findings far surpassed my expectations. It was not merely that the symbols and motifs I had expected to find were there. That might well have

been expected. Rather, what struck me most was the astonishing way in which they were used by the author. The combination and recombination of symbols, and the layering of motifs and meanings show the hand of a literary giant. The author's goals and purposes are reached not only through the narration of the story, nor only by the midrashic techniques of the citation and interpretation of Scriptural texts. The lesson, often, is found in the opposing meanings of the symbols. The forms with which the author worked, though restrictive and open-ended at once, never predetermine the flow of his argument and storytelling. Rather, these forms give the author the freedom to develop his ideas in a realistic manner: The change from despondency to hope is never linear; instead, the succession of the moods and emotions reflects the more normal process of ebb and flow.

Still, the logic of the argument is always clear. Starting with a basic premise, the author presents and overcomes one counter-argument after another, until a final resolution is reached at the end.

Two far-reaching issues underlie this whole process. The first is the question of God's justice; the second is the meaning and purpose of Jewish life.

It is startling to realize, at least from the vantage point of the secularized late twentieth century, that the question of God's role in history was already at the core of theological thinking nearly two thousand years ago (if not earlier). The temptation to blaspheme and declare, "There is no justice and there is no Judge" was as strong after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple as after the Holocaust of our own time. The tension that resulted from, on the one hand, remembering God's promise that the Temple in Jerusalem would be His abode "for all eternity," and, on the other, witnessing the burnt ruins of that Temple must have been painfully clear. The sights of tragic destruction and death must

have raised questions about the meaning and purpose of being God's "chosen people." It is these questions that the midrashist addressed, knowing full well that the continuity of Judaism depended on his answers.

Taking historical, objective realities and standing them on their head, the author managed to transform the events of Israel's history into stepping stones in a cosmic drama that began with the creation of the world and would end with its redemption. The destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar—and, over half a millennium later, by Titus—was not perceived as the result of ill-advised political alliances and desperate revolts. Rather, the midrashist shows them to be God's manipulation of history. People, individuals as well as groups, are seen as tools in God's hand; those who obey God succeed. Those who do not, are doomed to fail until they learn their lesson.

The midrashist also tackles the issue of the meaning and purpose of being Jewish. Taking Ps. 137:7 (עָרּו עָרּו עַד הַיְסוֹד בָּהּ—"Raze it, raze it, to its foundation") as a starting point, he seems to wonder whether Judaism itself has any basis or foundation. With Jerusalem and the Temple destroyed, and God's vow seemingly broken, with persecution and humiliation becoming the daily lot of the Jews, is there any point to protracting the conceit of being God's "chosen people?" In fact, would it be right to do that—to demand that people subject themselves to such abuse? For, if "there is no justice, and there is no Judge," then the belief in "chosenness" is without foundation and serves no purpose at all, and all that suffering is in vain.

The choice the midrashist made is clear. He believes that Israel has a double mission, imposed on it by God. First, Israel must make this world a better place by following the directions given by God. Secondly, in order to

hasten redemption (and, coincidentally, ease its own load), Israel must bring non-Jews to the protection and comfort offered by "God's wing."

The question of suffering is answered with the motif of purification. Isaiah, proclaiming himself a man of "unclean lips," has his lips purified by a burning coal from the Temple altar: "Then flew one of the seraphim to me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar; and he laid it upon my mouth, and said, "Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged." It is through this purification that Israel becomes qualified to be God's messenger to the nations of the world.

The success of the midrashist is attested by the survival of Judaism and the Jewish people. The result of his work, a record of the investigation made by several generations of Jewish scholars into the role of God in Israel's life, as well as of their exploration of the meaning and purpose of Jewish existence, is an invaluable step in the process begun with the Bible. The midrash has taken its rightful place, next to the stories of Abraham, Job, and Isaiah and their struggles to comprehend their mission and role in life.

This timeless exploration did not stop with *Pesiqta Rabbati* or with the midrashic collections that followed it. In times of relative security, as well as following every catastrophe, the questions posed by the midrashist assumed new vitality. In our own era, the aftermath of the Enlightenment, the Holocaust, the integration of the Jews in the modern western world, and the founding of the State of Israel have reinvigorated the enduring discussion.

Much in the same way that the midrashist used the Scriptures to advance his own reasoning, so can we use the result of his work to answer the questions before us today. To that end, however, further study and research of the

midrash is necessary. Such work should include a comparison of the Tish`ah be-'Av *pisqa'ot* in *Pesiqta Rabbati* to their parallels in the *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana*, as well as to parallel sections in other midrashic collections. The results of such a comparison would most likely highlight the development of the symbols and motifs employed by the authors, clarifying the extent of the redactor's hand in the *Rabbati.* Such work also might help in dating the *Pesiqta Rabbati*. Furthermore, it would shed light on the specific audience the author of the *Rabbati* had in mind, as well as the issues that confronted that audience.

The many variances in the text, born of human error, differing interpretations and readings, and the dearth of scholarly work prior to the middle of the nineteenth century, have made the study of *Pesiqta Rabbati* an intimidating task. A critical text, the result of the scientific comparisons of the extant manuscripts, editions, and translations would be invaluable in making this midrashic collection more accessible to the contemporary reader, and in allowing him or her to become a participant in the ongoing, long-lived discussion regarding the relevance and meaning of Judaism in their lives.

The truth is that our own questions, today, with the Holocaust's grave shadow still over us, are but an extension of the very questions the Rabbis asked, their own holocaust barely behind them, and an uncertain future ahead. The survival of the Jewish people, beyond us and into the future, is dependent on our seeking responses to difficult questions, regardless of the limited capacity of our minds to comprehend the very answers we seek.

The need for the presence of the Divine in people's lives is as old as humanity itself. The necessity to be a part of something greater than oneself, to perceive a role for ourselves in the unfolding drama of life, to have answers for those questions that the human mind cannot even pose, let alone answer, harkens back to the image of Adam and Eve, looking at the closed gates of Paradise and, with aching loneliness, wondering, "What now?..."

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