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Aqedah: Midrash as Visualization

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AQEDAH: MIDRASH AS VISUALIZATION

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You too saw with the understanding of your heart...[1]

A scholarly commonplace has it that Greek culture was visual in contrast to Hebrew culture, which was auditory.[2] However, *midrash aggadah*, as an expression of the rabbinic imagination operating on the biblical text, can be highly visual. For the purpose of this initial exploration of how the sages move in the shuttle-space between word and image,[3] I

[1] *Haggadat Shema` Yisrael* (*Bet Midrash*, ed. Jellinek 5:166). In this text Moses, after describing in detail the wonderous visions which he saw during his ascent to heaven, addresses Israel and says: "You too saw with the understanding of your heart and your mind and your soul how [God] was revealed at the Sea...". For "seeing with the mind" as a motto for "visualization", see Appendix I.

[2] See for example, Heinrich Graetz, *The Structure of Jewish History and other Essays*, translated, edited and introduced by Ismar Schorsch (New York, 1975), 68-9: "Paganism sees its god, Judaism hears Him;" Thorleif Bowman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (New York, 1960), 113-22 and *passim*; Susan Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany, 1982), 33; Jose Faur, *Golden Doves with Silver Spots: Semiotics and Textuality in Rabbinic Tradition* (Bloomington, 1986), 29-32; Lionel Kochan, *Beyond the Graven Image: A Jewish View* (New York, 1997), *passim*. For the corrective to this view in recent scholarship, see Appendix II.

[3] For the currency of discussion about the relationship of word and image in the contemporary academy, see below, note 33. In light of the much discussed "intertextual"

will primarily focus on several examples drawn from the legends of the *Aqedah*.[4] In the biblical story of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis, Chapter 22), which consists of only nineteen verses altogether, the root *resh-aleph-he* ("see") functions as a *Leitwortstil*, being repeated no less than six times.[5] For this reason, the *Aqedah* , as reflected in midrashic tradition, provides a

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nature of midrash (see for example, Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* [Bloomington, 1990]), the process of midrashic visualization may be pictured as a kind of double-move, from the scriptural sub-text to the mental image and from that image to the resultant midrashic text. Perhaps for this reason, the relatively ephemeral stage of mental imaging, which connects two more concrete textual expressions, has hitherto received relatively little scholarly attention. The problematic relation of the visual to the verbal might profitably be compared to what Freud described as the primary and secondary processes of the human psyche (what Jung referred to as the distinction between fantasy and directed thinking). The former, which is particularly characteristic of the original content of dreams, is more immediately visual, condensed and symbolic. While the latter is more logical, narrative and cognitive. Such directed thinking is employed in the secondary stage of translating the dream images into thoughts that can be expressed verbally. For an initial attempt to apply the Freudian category of primary thought processes to the analysis of midrash, see Maren R. Niehoff, "Associative Thinking in the Midrash Exemplified by the Rabbinic Interpretation of the Journey of Abraham and Sarah to Egypt," *Tarbitz* 62 (1993): 339-59 [Hebrew] and Adiel Kosmann, "Note: More on Associative Thinking in the *Midrash*," *Tarbitz* 63 (1994): 443-50 [Hebrew]. Kosmann emphasizes that according to Freud visual images are primary in the creation of the dream and suggests a parallel to midrashic creativity. Unfortunately, Kosmann cites only one text from rabbinic literature, which does not provide a particularly appropriate example of the visual aspect of midrash. A partial corrective is supplied in the examples discussed below.

[4] Within the limits of this initial study, I have intentionally chosen to focus primarily on the midrashic material relating to one particularly rich biblical pericope. Not surprisingly, a similarly rich set of examples can be found in the midrashic traditions on "And all the people see the voices" (Exod. 20:15); see M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, Vol. 16, pp. 136-141, sections 430-442. I have found numerous other examples of what I see as "midrashic visualization", not connected with any biblical subtext which mentions "seeing", which await future elaboration.

[5] As pointed out by Jo Milgrom, in her outstanding study, *The Binding of Isaac: the Akedah, a Primary Symbol in Jewish Thought and Art* (Berkeley, 1988), 8-11, 62. As Milgrom demonstrates, pp. 8, 60-2, the *leitwortstil* of "seeing" is linked to the theme of "separation" in each of the "ten trials" which Abraham underwent, leading up to the last trial, the binding of Isaac. For the *Aqedah*, see Gen 22:2,4,8,13,14 (twice). See also *On the Bible: Eighteen Studies by Martin Buber*, ed. N. N. Glatzer (New York, 1968), "Abraham the Seer,", 22-43, esp. 41-3.

apt starting point for illustrating what I shall refer to as "visualization"[6] in rabbinic thinking.

When Abraham comes within view of Mt. Moriah,[7] scripture tells us that "Abraham lifted his eyes and he saw the place from afar" (Gen. 22:4). On this verse, *Genesis Rabbah* comments:[8]

> What did he see? He saw a cloud hovering on the mountain (*qashur ba-har*).[9] He said [to himself]: It seems that this is the place that the Holy One, blessed be He, told me to sacrifice my son there. He said to him: Isaac, my son, do you see what I see? He answered: Yes. He said to his two servants: Do you see what I see? They answered: No. He said: Since you do not see, "stay here with the ass" [*`im he-chamor*] (Gen. 22:5), [which can be read] *`am he-chamor* ("ass-people"), for you are like the ass [which also cannot see what Isaac and I see].[10]

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[6] See Appendix I.

[7] Note that this name can be understood to mean, "the mountain of vision". See Gen. 22:14: "So Abraham called that place `The Lord will see', as it is said to this day, `On the mount of the Lord, He shall be seen'". See also II Chron. 3:1 (esp. according to the reading of the LXX: "...where the Lord appeared to David"). The place name Moriah is clearly derived from the Hebrew root *ra'ah*, "to see" by Aquila (*ton katafani*, "that which is clearly seen") and by Symmachus (*tis optasias*, "vision"); see *Encyclopaedia Biblica* 5:458- 460 [Hebrew]; *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ed. David Noel Friedman, New York, 1992, 1997), s.v. Moriah (James R. Davila) regards this as a "folk etymology". But compare Jon Levenson, *Sinai and Zion* (Minneapolis, Chicago & New York, 1985), 94-5: "The rabbis of the post-biblical era identified Mount Zion with the Mount Moriah on which Chronicles locates Solomon's Temple and hence with the Land of Moriah...The Hebrew Bible presents both Abraham and David as having undergone visionary experiences on that spot (Gen 22:12; 2 Chr. 3:1)...In both cases, there is a play on Moriah and the verb *ra'a* , `to see,' and its derivative nouns, *mar'a* and *mar'e*, meaning `sight, spectacle, vision.' The visionary experiences of Abraham and of David serve as authorizations for the inauguration of the Temple on Mount Zion/Moriah... Mount Zion is a place of visionary experience." See below, note 16 on *Tzofim*.

[8] All translations of rabbinic texts are mine unless otherwise stated. This passage is found in *Bereshit Rabbah* 56:2 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 595-6) and the numerous parallels listed by Albeck (line 10); see also *Torah Shelemah* to Gen. 22:4, section 68.

[9] *Midrash Sekhel Tov* to Gen. 22:4 identifies the source of this tradition: "the men of the Holy City brought a homily".

[10] See *Tanchuma Buber*, Va-Yera, 46: "Just as the ass sees and doesn't know, so are you people like an ass"; *Midrash Sekhel Tov* to Gen. 22:5: "Just as the ass did not see and did not

When the midrash asks: "What did Abraham see?" it is—I suggest—inviting us to "lift up our eyes" like the Patriarch and visualize what he might have seen. Our Father Abraham's question to his son: "Do you see what I see?" can be seen as also addressed to us, the Patriarch's spiritual descendants. Are we able to visualize what he is said to have seen? The answer to the rhetorical question functions to give us one possible view through Abraham's eyes. Here a cloud, apparently symbolizing the divine presence of God,[11] hovering on the mountain is envisaged. Significantly, Isaac sees the same vision; while the two servants do not. And those who cannot see what Abraham and Isaac see are left behind with the ass. But what does it mean that the servants, like the ass, cannot "see"?[12] Certainly this does not imply that they were physically blind, but rather that they are spiritually blind. They are unable to visualize—they are unable to

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understand, so too are you similar". See J. Heinemann, "People like the Ass," *Moldad* 22 (1964), 456-62 [Hebrew]; summarized in Heinemann's *Aggadot ve-Toledotehen* (Jerusalem, 1974), 122-4 [Hebrew], who argues that "people like an ass" is a polemical slogan directed against Christians who "could not see God". Heinemann bases his argument partly on a midrashic derivation of *Yisrael* ("Israel, the Jewish People") as *Ish Ra'ah 'El* ("man who saw God"), found repeatedly in the writings of Philo (see G. Delling, "The `One Who Sees God' in Philo," in *Nourished with Peace...in Memory of Samuel Sandmel* , ed. F. E. Greenspahn et al. [Chico CA, 1984], 27-41); in The Prayer of Joseph (see Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Prayer of Joseph," in *Religions in Antiquity...for Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* , ed. J. Neusner [Leiden, 1970], 265-8) and in *Seder Eliyahu Rabbah* 27 (ed. Friedmann, 138-9). See also Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1994), 13-51 (Chapter I, "Israel: the One Who Sees God", and particularly p. 50. In support of Heinemann's argument, I have found a number of Church Fathers, commenting on Gen. 22:4, who claim that the ass represents the Jews who stubbornly refuse to "see" that Jesus is God; see, for example, Ambrose of Milan, De Abraham I:8.70-71.

[11] On "cloud" as a manifestation of the divine presence in the Hebrew Bible, see *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York, 1992, 1997), s.v. Pillar of Fire and Cloud (Joel C. Slayton) and particularly the reference there to G. Mendenhall, *The Tenth Generation* (Baltimore, 1973), pp. 32-66, for his extended discussion of how the cloud both reveals and conceals the divine presence. See also *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (1987, 1995), s.v. Clouds (James Kirsch), who notes that "God is completely identified with the cloud; it is totally numinous...something simultaneously concrete and spiritual".

[12] Note the formulation of Abraham's reply to the servants: "Since you do not see".

"see" with the understanding of the heart[13] — what Abraham and Isaac recognize as a divine apparition.[14]

This point becomes clearer in a parallel version of this midrash found in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*:[15]

> On the third day they arrived at *Tzofim*.[16] And when they arrived at *Tzofim*, he [Abraham] saw the glory of the *Shekhinah* ["the presence of God"] standing on top of the mountain, as it is said: "On the third day, Abraham lifted his eyes and saw the place [*ha- maqom*] from afar" (Gen. 22:4). What did he see? He saw a pillar of fire[17] [extending] from the earth to the heavens.[18] He said to Isaac his son: My son, do you see anything in one of these mountains? He answered: Yes. He [Abraham] asked him:

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[13] See Appendix I.

[14] On the idea that what distinguishes Jews from Gentiles is that only the former can "see God", see above, note 10.

[15] *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chapter 31, ed. Luria, 70a-b. See also the translation (on the basis of the Epstein MS) with notes by G. Friedlander (1916), 15-6.

[16] It seems to me that what is being referred to here is *Har Ha-Tzofim*, "Mt. Scopus", the summit adjacent to the Temple Mount, which provides a clear view of Mt. Moriah. Compare the notes by Luria (20) and by Friedlander (8). The key point for our discussion here is that the place name *Tzofim* (literally "seers") is derived from the root *Tz-f-h* which indicates "seeing" (particularly from a distance of place or time), thus echoing the idea that the vicinity to which they had arrived, Mt. Moriah, was the "Mountain of Vision" (see above, note 7).

[17] Significantly, in a recently published text from Qumran (4Q225), entitled by its editors, "Pseudo- Jubilees" (J. C. VanderKam and J. T. Milik, *Discoveries in the Judaean Desert* XIII [Oxford, 1994], 141-55), Abraham beholds on Mt. Moriah a "fire". See Geza Vermes, "New Light on the Sacrifice of Isaac from 4Q225," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 47 (1996), 140-46, and particularly p. 142, n. 10 where Vermes notes that the closest parallel is found in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*. I discussed the significance of this parallel in a Hebrew lecture: "The Aqedah at Qumran: Fire on the Mountain", given at the Orion Center for the Study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and Associated Literature, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, May 21, 1998; an English abstract of the lecture is available at the Orion Center website, http://orion.mscc.huji.ac.il (see the index of papers).

[18] See Exod. 13:21 for the "pillar of fire" that went before Israel to lead them in the desert, clearly some kind of divine apparition. See above note 11, on "Pillar of Fire and Cloud" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*. *Midrash Sekhel Tov* to Gen. 22:4 combines this with the version found in *Bereshit Rabbah*: "he [Abraham] saw a cloud hovering on the mountain, and a pillar of fire within it".

> What do you see? He [Isaac] answered him: I see a pillar of fire extending from the earth to the heavens.[19]

Here it is clear that the idea that Abraham "saw the glory of the *Shekhinah* standing on the top of the mountain" is derived midrashically by reading the biblical word *ha-maqom*, "the place", as the rabbinic epithet for God, *ha-maqom*, "the Omnipresent". Significantly, this midrashic reading is already found in the writings of the first-century-CE Alexandrian philosopher and exegete, Philo.[20]

Other parallel versions are more specific about what is was that Abraham's servants saw, which caused them to be left behind and

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[19] Friedlander (p. 226, note 1) notes that this exchange between Abraham and Isaac is found in the first editions of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer*. It seems to be missing in the MS used by Friedlander due to a homoeoteleuton, "heavens...heavens". A more thorough investigation of the textual evidence awaits the critical edition of *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* by Prof. Lewis Barth now in preparation.

[20] *De Posteritate Caini* VI (17-18), *Philo* (Loeb Classical Library) Vol. II (Cambridge and London, 1929), 337: "seeth the place from afar" (Gen. xxii.3 f.). What place? The one which he had reached? And how can it be far off if he is already there? It may be that what we are told under a figure is to this effect. The wise man is ever longing to discern the Ruler of the Universe...for the eyes of his understanding have been opened". Not surprisingly, Philo seems to interpret Abraham's "seeing" God in a significantly more figurative way than the Rabbis. Note also the difference in the way Philo phrases his rhetorical question, "What place?", as opposed to the rhetorical question in the midrashic texts cited above, "What did he [Abraham] **see**?". See also, *De Somniis* I (64-65), *Philo* Vol. V, 331: "...he saw the place from afar" (Gen. xxii.3f.). Tell me, pray, did he who had come to the place see it from afar? Nay, it would seem that one and the same word is used of two different things: one of these is a divine Word, the other God Who was before the Word". Note Philo's discussion immediately preceding this passage (I, 63-64, p. 329): "God Himself is called a place, by reason of His containing things, and being contained by nothing whatever...for He is that which He Himself has occupied, and naught encloses Him but Himself...the Deity, being contained by nothing, is of necessity Itself Its own place". Compare *Bereshit Rabbah* 68:9 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, 777-8): "R. Huna in the name of R. Ami: Why is the Holy One, blessed be He, given an epithet and called *ha- maqom* (literally "the place", i.e. the Omnipresent)? Because He is the place of the world. R. Yosi be-R. Halafta said: ...the Holy One, blessed be He, is the place of the world and the world is not His place". See the extended discussion of the use of the word "place" as an epithet for God, in E. E. Urbach, *The Sages– Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1975), Vol. I, 66-75, and especially p. 75 where he discusses Philo's exposition of Gen. 22:4 and notes that "Only in a late Midrash, in *Pirqe de-R. Eliezer* (xxxi), do we find a version that identifies *Ha-Maqom* in the verse as the Shekhina".

compared with the ass. According to one *Tanchuma* text, when Abraham asks his servants, "Do you see anything?", they reply: "We see a tall mountain, and on it woods and trees".[21] Note that according to this version, what the servants see is completely realistic; they see just what we would expect to see, a completely normal mountain. According to another *Tanchuma* text,[22] in reply to Abraham's question the servants say: "We see only deserts".[23] The point of both of these versions is that the servants do see something, but what they see is "nothing special"; their vision is devoid of spiritual perception.

Another related midrashic tradition goes beyond giving us a simple "snap-shot" view of what the characters in the story might have seen; but rolls before our eyes an animated narrative, in surrealistic style, of how this unique mountain came to be:[24]

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[21] See *Tanchuma* (ed. Buber) Va-Yera 46. This is the reading of MS Vatican 34, which seems to preserve many authentic readings; see M. Bregman, *The Tanhuma-Yelammedenu Literature: Studies in the Evolution of the Versions* (Ph.D. diss., The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1991), 23-4 [Hebrew with English Abstract]. Compare Buber, p. 113, note 253 who regards this phrase as "an addition by some copiest"; his emendation of the text may have been motivated by apologetic reasons, as will become clearer in the following discussion.

[22] *Tanchuma* (standard version) Va-Yera 23.

[23] It seems to me that there are two very different ways to understand "deserts" (*midbarot*) here. 1) The servants see a mountain but it is desolate, symbolically emphasizing that they do not recognize Mt. Moriah's spiritual uniqueness. 2) The servants do not even see any physical mountain at all, but only desert plains. This understanding would tally with the midrashic tradition cited below that originally there was no mountain there. This would suggest a very daring re-reading of the entire *Aqedah* story: that the mountain which Abraham and Isaac ascended to fulfill God's command was not a physical mountain, but a spiritual one, which can be perceived only by those who participate in the sacrifice. See further below, note 25, for the idea that the place was made into a mountain temporarily for the time of the *Aqedah*.

[24] Translated from *Tanchuma* , Va-Yera 22, at the end of a passage found in the Mantua 1563 edition and later printings based on it; see *Tanhuma* (ed. Buber) Va-Yera 43, note 227; a parallel text is cited as coming from "midrash" in *Yalqut Shimoni* I, 100 (ed. Yitzhaq Shiloni, Jerusalem, 1973, Vol. 1, 441; see the note to line 22 on p. 440). The end of *Tanchuma*, Va-Yera 22 and the beginning of section 23 (excluding the entire sentence incorporating the midrash on the name "Moriah"), is found in Bialik and Ravnitzky's *Sefer Ha- Aggadah* (Tel Aviv, 1967)

> "And he saw the place from afar" (Gen. 22:4). And how did it look from afar? This [phrase, "the place from afar"] teaches that from the beginning it was a deep place [*maqom `amoq*]. When the Holy One said to settle His divine presence on it and to make it a sanctuary, He said: It is not the way of a king to dwell in a valley [*`emeq*] but in a high and lofty and beautified place visible to all. So the Holy One, blessed be He—may He be blessed!–made a sign to the mountains around the valley to come together to one place to make a place for the divine presence. This is why it is called Mt. Moriah [here understood to mean "fear" (*mor'ah*) of God (*Yah*)], because from fear of the Holy One, blessed be He—may He be blessed!—it became a mountain.[25]

Here the biblical word *me-rachoq* ("from afar") seems to be understood not as "from a far distant place", but as "from a far-away time". This midrashic re-reading is what motivates the narrative of how the place began as a valley that was miraculously and magisterially turned by God into a mountain.[26] Since the text does not specify when it was that God decided to make this particular place the site of the Temple, it is difficult to know for sure when in history this mythic miracle is thought to have

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[I.iii.4, section 45], 31; and in the English translation by W. Braude, *The Book of Legends: Sefer Ha-Aggadah* (New York, 1992), 41.

[25] Compare *Midrash Chaserot ve-Yeterot* 27 (*Batei Midrashot*, ed. S. A. Werthheimer, second edition enlarged and amended by A. J. Wertheimer, Jerusalem 5728, Vol. 2, 239): "And go unto the land of Moriah" (Gen. 22:2). The word Moriah is written *plene* (with the letter *yod*). Why? Because from the fear of God (*mi-yir'at Yah*) it became a mountain. See there note 113, for the editor's interpretation of the passage found in *Tanchuma* and *Yalqut Shimoni* (see above, note 24) that the valley was made into a mountain only temporarily, at the time of the *Aqedah*, and then became a valley again, so that no idolatry would be performed on it (see *Mishnah Avodah Zarah* 3:5; *Talmud Yerushalmi Avodah Zarah* 3:7, 43a). As suggested by the verse, "for it will be said, today on a mountain the Lord will appear" (Gen. 22:14), [only] at the time of the building of the Temple will it again be a mountain and God's divine presence will appear there.

[26] Compare the image in Isa. 40:4: "every valley shall be exalted".

taken place.[27] It seems as if the entire legend transpires in a kind of "metahistorical" time frame,[28] befitting the narration of myth.[29]

We have examined this whole complex of interrelated midrashic traditions in considerable detail because each tradition complements the other, and because taken together they provide a remarkably rich introductory example to the general topic of this presentation: midrash as visualization. By this I mean to suggest a particular way of seeing midrash as a kind of visualizing with the "mind's eye" what might be suggested by scripture, even by the most subtle verbal stimuli in the biblical text. In this complex of traditions on the biblical statement that Abraham "saw the place from afar", we are presented with various possible views of the place, and not only through the eyes of Abraham, but through the eyes of every other available character in the biblical scene: Isaac, Abraham's two

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[27] It does not seem that the miracle was performed at the time of creation, since "from the beginning it was deep place". Nor does it seem that the miracle took place at the time of the *Aqedah*, since according to the midrashic reading of the verse, Abraham saw the place "from a far-away time". What seems to be suggested is that this "far-away time" is in the future, from the perspective of Patriarchal times; that is to say, God "said to settle His divine presence on it and to make it a sanctuary" at the time of the building of the Temple in Jerusalem. According to this reading of the text, Abraham and Isaac's vision of Mt. Moriah is indeed prophetic, and the mountain is more a spiritual than a physical one. See Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, in his discussion of "Zion as the Cosmic Mountain" (pp. 111-137), pp. 115-116: "Geography is often, to the `primitive' [quotation marks in the original] mind, simply the physical representation of transcendent reality...to the unscientific mind...geography is simply a visible form of theology." See also p. 122 (paraphrasing Eliade): "[The cosmic mountain] is the prime place of communication between transcendent and mundane reality."

[28] See Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore, 1975); compare *Metahistory: Six Critiques [History and Theory, Beiheft 19: Papers Originally Written in Connection with a Conference on Hayden White's Metahistory*] (Middletown, Conn., 1980).

[29] See Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 127: "mythic consciousness...conceives time as nonlinear...The cosmic mountain is a *place*, that is to say, a point in the dimension of space, in which temporality as we know it does not exist, but only `sacred time [which] *by its very nature...is reversible,* in the sense that properly speaking, it is a *primordial mythical time made present*.' (quoting, M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 68)."

servants, and even their ass![30] The rhetorical questions so typical of midrashic style, such as "What did Abraham see?", "And how did the place look from afar" are, I suggest, more than just "rhetorical turns of phrase"[31]; they can be read as verbal cues that tell us to pause and try to visualize for ourselves.[32] Only after this "invitation" to us to visualize for ourselves,[33] does the midrash (employing classic "Socratic pedagogic method") go on to give us its visualization. And as we have seen, the midrash on "he saw the place from afar" (taken as a whole complex of various traditions) offers us a variety of possible visualizations.

In presenting the following example, I will attempt to further illustrate the midrashic stratagem of inviting its audience to visualize what is depicted in the biblical text before presenting its own visualization. And I'll do this by asking you, the reader, to participate in such a "midrashic visualization exercise". After Abraham is stopped by the angel of God from actually carrying out the sacrifice of Isaac, scripture continues with the following verse (Gen. 22:13):

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[30] In contemporary literary terminology, this is referred to as the question of "focalization" of the narrative, from what or whose "point of view" is the story told. See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (London and New York, 1983), Chapter 6 "Text: focalization", 71-85; see also Nurit Hermon, *Focalization and Narration — A Critical Relationship in Three Models of the Narrative Text* (M.A. thesis, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, English Department, 1984).

[31] See J. Heinemann, *Derashot be-Tzibur bi-Tequfat ha-Talmud* (Jerusalem, 1970), *passim,* who sees such rhetorical questions as evidence of the oral homiletical substrate of much of midrash, as it has come down to us in later literary form. The *darshanim* who created midrash, in Heinemann's view, regularly addressed such rhetorical questions to their audience to engage their attention in the flow of the homily.

[32] I see here a fundamental distinction between reading midrash for "what it was", the historical approach, represented by Heinemann (see the previous note) and for "what it *is* ", as a still vibrant form of hermeneutic communication between the creator of midrash and us, the present audience of the midrash. Though trained in the former approach, I have come to appreciate the value of the latter approach, particularly in teaching midrash.

[33] Compare, for example, the famous passage in *Tristam Shandy*, where Sterne introduces his "beautiful heroine" by inviting the reader to imagine her and leaves a blank page for this purpose. My thanks to Prof. Murray Roston for calling my attention to this passage in discussion at the conference on the relationship between Word and Image: "Iconotrophism: Turning toward Pictures", held at Bar-Ilan University, March 23- 25, 1998.

> And Abraham lifted his eyes and saw, and behold! a ram behind,[34] caught in a thicket by its horns.

What might have caused Abraham, at this fateful moment, to look behind him and see the ram? Perhaps the ram did something to attract Abraham's attention, such as bleating. But now try to *visualize* what the ram might have done to attract Abraham's attention, using only pictorial means.

With your own mental picture in mind, let's now take a look at how some ancient artists have actually depicted this scene.

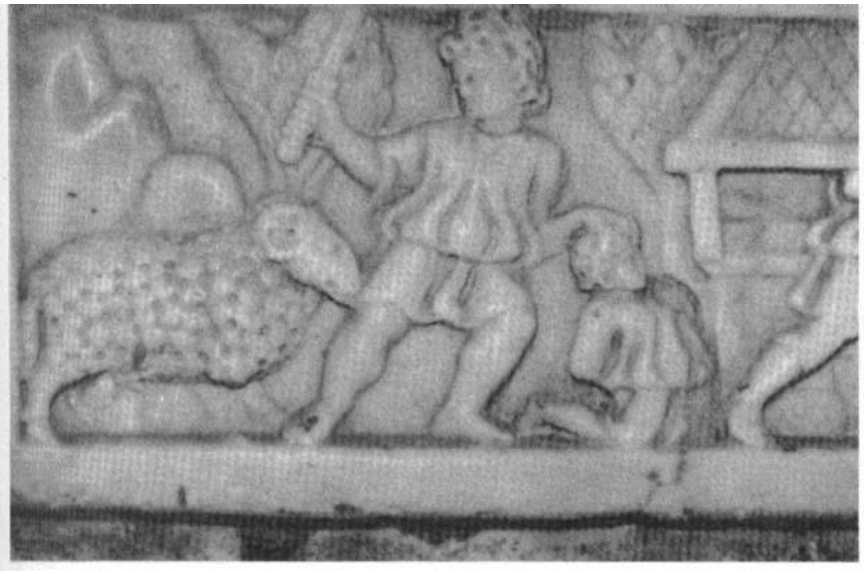

Figure 1

Figure 1 is a depiction of the Offering of Isaac, from a third-century Christian sarcophagus.[35] Note that Abraham seems to have just turned his

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[34] *Achar*, "behind", that is to say, behind Abraham. This seems to be the most natural reading of the Hebrew text as it has come down to us; though it is syntactically problematic. This has given rise to various other readings and proposed emendations beginning with the ancient versions; see below, note 36.

[35] Mas d'Aire sarcophagus lid (left side). Source: Graydon Snyder, *Ante Pacem* (Mercer University, 1985), plate 24; reproduced in Robin M. Jensen, "The Offering of Isaac in Jewish

head from looking at Isaac who he was about to sacrifice, and is now looking down at the ram.[36] And significantly the ram's mouth is positioned so that it is just touching the hem of Abraham's garment. To me it seems as if the ram is here being depicted as tugging at Abraham's clothes and in this way succeeding in attracting Abraham's attention to itself. Of course it is impossible to prove conclusively that this exegetical idea is what the artist was consciously trying to depict. However, significantly, what seem to me to be other examples of the depiction of this exegetical idea occur in other Christian artistic portrayals of the Offering of Isaac. Figure 2 is an image from the famous sixth-century wall-mosaics in the Cathedral of San Vitale in Ravenna.[37] Abraham is depicted here at the instant the angel calls forth to him from heaven (represented by a hand)[38] to stop the sacrifice at the last moment. For this reason Abraham's glance is directed to heaven. But note that the ram seems to be again holding the edge of Abraham's garment in its mouth; indeed it is hard to understand why this side of the garment should be standing out at the angle it is unless it is being pulled from below. Here too it seems to me

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Tradition and Christian Tradition: Image and Text," *Biblical Interpretation* 2:1 (1994), 89, figure 4. On page 87-8, Jensen comments: "A third-century sarcophagus relief from Mas d'Aire ...Abraham's eyes however, are not on the boy but on the substitute ram behind him".

[36] The fact that the ram is here and in the other Christian images presented below depicted as beside Abraham, rather than behind him (compare Jensen's comment in the previous note) may be related to the limitations of Byzantine conventions for portraying perspective, or to the fact that the Septuagint and other ancient versions do not reflect a reading of the Hebrew text of Gen. 22:13 which had the word "behind". Significantly, in the fourth-century Jewish portrayal of the *Aqedah* scene in the frescos at Dura Europus (see C. H. Kraeling, *The Synagogue: Excavations at Dura, Final Report*), the ram is portrayed below, apparently in the foreground, and Abraham is depicted above the ram, apparently in the mid-ground, with his back to the ram and curiously also to the viewer. This may be an attempt to convey the idea that the ram was behind Abraham, as the traditional Hebrew text suggests.

[37] Jensen, "Offering of Isaac", 95, figure 10 (author's photograph).

[38] For more on this motif, with extensive bibliography, see Marc Bregman, "The Riddle of the Ram in Genesis Chapter 22: Jewish-Christian Contacts in Late Antiquity," *The Sacrifice of Isaac in the Three Monotheistic Religions* [Studium Biblicum Franciscanum Analecta 41] (Jerusalem, 1995), 133.

that the ram is being depicted as tugging at Abraham's clothing[39] in order to attract his attention, and to divert his gaze from the heavenly voice to the earthly ram.

Figure 2

In Figure 3, we have yet another example, taken from another fourth-century Christian sarcophagus.[40]

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[39] I recall a lecture, many years ago, in which the late Prof. Yigal Yadin, argued that in this Byzantine mosaic Abraham is pictured as wearing a *tallit*, particularly on the basis of the similarity between the two parallel markings visible on the right side of Abraham's garment and markings found on ancient *tallit* fragments discovered at Qumran. See Yigal Yadin, *Bar-Kokhba: The Rediscovery of the Legendary Hero of the Second Jewish Revolt Against Rome* (New York, 1971), 66-85 ("Wardrobe"). For a clear illustration of Abraham wearing a *Tallit* in the frescoes at Dura, see Kraeling, *The Synagogue*, plate 78. My thanks to Dr. Stephen J. Pfann, director of the Centre for the Study of Early Christianity, Jerusalem, for these references. See further below, note 47.

[40] Junius Bassus sarcophagus, Vatican Treasury; Jensen, "Offering of Isaac," 94, figure 9 (author's photograph).

Figure 3

Here the ram, whose muzzle unfortunately is broken off in the extant bas-relief, seems to be reaching up to pluck with its mouth at Abraham's sleeve. Note that in these three images we do not have one standard compositional type; but rather each artist has positioned the ram in such a way that it seems to be tugging at (or about to tug) some part of Abraham's clothing.[41] I suggest that we have here various pictorial representations of the idea that the ram used this means of attracting

[41] Also note that the portrayal of this motif seems to be significantly important to each of these artists to have caused them to forego depicting what is plainly stated in scripture, that the ram was "caught in a bush by its horns".

Abraham's attention, to express its willingness to be sacrificed in place of Isaac.[42]

Significantly, a very similar exegetical idea is clearly expressed in the midrash:[43]

> Rabbi Zechariah says: That ram, which was created at twilight [just before the beginning of the first Sabbath at the time of the creation],[44] was running, and came to be sacrificed in place of Isaac. But Satan was standing there and misdirecting it,[45] in order to prevent the offering [of the ram] of Abraham, our Patriarch. And it was caught by its two horns among the trees, as it is said: "And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw,

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[42] The objection has been raised (Prof. Ellen Spolsky, Bar Ilan University, in email correspondence, May 1998), about whether it is appropriate to compare Christian plastic images to what I am calling midrashic visualizations of the text of the Hebrew bible without mentioning the pervasive Christian tradition of typology which interprets the lamb (Gen. 22:7) and/or the ram (vs. 17) as Christ who willingly offers himself as a sacrifice for the salvation of mankind. While this point certainly deserves further elaboration, I would note that in the midrashic text presented below, the ram is also clearly not merely a sacrificial animal, but willingly and even zealously offers itself for sacrifice in place of Isaac.

[43] *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* 31 (ed. Luria 71b); see also the Friedlander translation, p. 228; and Braude's translation of this passage, cited in *Sefer Ha-Aggadah–Book of Legends*, p. 42.

[44] See the notes by Luria (n. 60); Friedlander (228, n. 8) and Braude, 42 n. 2. And see further below, note 46.

[45] Luria's text here reads *u-masteh*, which Luria (n. 62) interprets as "misdirecting". Other versions, including apparently the Epstein MS used by Friedlander, read *u-mastino* (see below); see also ed. Higger (based on MSS readings, published in *Horeb* 10, 195); *Midrash Ha-Gadol* to Gen. 22:13 (ed. Margulies, 357); *Yalqut Shimoni* I:101 (ed. Shiloni, I:451, see note to line 33), which he translates as "distracting" (compare Braude's translation of this term, "kept blocking"). Friedlander (note 9) relates the use of the term *masteno* here, to a parallel tradition in Jubilees 18:12 in which Satan is referred to as *Mastema* [which indeed is found in the Qumran fragment of Pseudo-Jubilees referred to above, note 17]. This goes along with the contention of Friedlander ("Introduction", xxi-liii), and other scholars, that there are "points of contact" between *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* and works from the Second Temple period Pseudepigrapha, such as Jubilees. For a more skeptical view of this question, see Anna Urowitz-Freudenstein, "Pseudepigraphic Support of Pseudepigraphical Sources: the Case of *Pirqe de Rabbi Eliezer*," *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, edited by John C. Reeves (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 35-53; compare my lecture, referred to above, note 17. The reading *u-mastino*, which seems well documented in the available textual witnesses, is clearly related to "Satan", and might best be translated that "[Satan was] bedeviling" [the ram].

> and behold! a ram behind, caught in a thicket by its horns" (Gen. 22:13). What did the ram do? It stretched out its hand (*yado*)[46] onto Abraham's *tallit*.[47] Abraham looked and saw the ram, and took it, and released it, and sacrificed it instead of Isaac, as it is said: "And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son" (Gen. 22:13).

From the beginning of the comment attributed to Rabbi Zechariah, it is clear that we have here a very special ram.[48] The depiction of this ram is, here again, more than just a snapshot visualization. Rather, a highly animated narrative is projected, about how Satan tried to prevent the ram from fulfilling its destiny and desire to be sacrificed in place of Isaac. And again we have a rhetorical question, "What did the ram do?", here inviting us (according to my suggestion above) to first try to picture to ourselves how the ram might have managed to extricate itself from Satan's ploy. The rhetorical question, offered by the midrash in its visualization, is remarkably imaginative, particularly if we take the Hebrew text at face value. This unique ram is said to have "stretched out its hand."[49] This curious detail fits into a well-attested tendency in rabbinic tradition to

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[46] See the discussion below, particularly note 47.

[47] Significantly, in the Ravena mosaic, Abraham also seems to be depicted wearing a *tallit*, see above, note 39. In the midrashic text, this word might simply indicate an "outer mantle" or cloak. However, the image of the *tallit*, which often indicates a "fringed ritual garment", may serve to underscore symbolically that Abraham is carrying out a ritual act of deep religious significance: the offering up to God of his son Isaac, followed by the sacrifice of the ram in his place.

[48] On the inclusion of the ram among those unique things that were created at the last moment before the end of the six days of creation, see L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, V, 109, n. 99.

[49] *Pashat 'et yado*, Friedlander translates "put forth its leg"; Braude "stretched out its foreleg". While *yad* can be used in Rabbinic Hebrew to indicate the "foreleg" (or hoof) of a four-legged animal, such as a sacrificial lamb (see, for example, Mishnah Tamid 4:2; my thanks to Prof. Michael Swartz, Ohio State University, for this reference), this Hebrew word normally means "hand", as in the idiomatic expression *pashat 'et yado*, "stretched forth his hand". Consequently, I think that *yad* here is best understood as referring to the ram's humanlike "hand".

personify animals.[50] Note that the verbalized visualization of the midrash here produces a mental image that is highly imaginative, in contrast to the artistic depictions, which, despite the pervasive Christian typological interpretation of the ram (see above, note 42), seem more naturalistic. Despite the highly stylized conventions of Byzantine art, the ram is portrayed as attracting Abraham's attention in the way a normal four-legged animal might very well do this; by keeping its legs on the ground and tugging at a person's garment with its mouth. In contrast, the midrash personalizes the ram, making it a more human-like character in the legendary reimagining of the biblical scene. The graphic artist portrays the scene to the viewer's physical eye; while the midrashic artist portrays the scene to and through the imaginative faculty of the reader's mind's eye.

The graphic artist and the midrashic artist, who paints with words, may employ significantly different methods to visually depict and elaborate the biblical narrative, as the next example will further illustrate. In the legends of the *Aqedah* , there is a tradition that Sarah died as a result of what happened to Isaac on Mt. Moriah.[51] In some (apparently earlier) versions of this legend, it is Isaac himself who tells his mother Sarah about what his father did to him that causes her death.[52] In other (apparently

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[50] See Victor Aptowitzer, "The Rewarding and Punishing of Animals and Inanimate Objects: On the Aggadic View of the World," *Hebrew Union College Annual* (1926), 117-55; Malachi Beit-Arie, *Perek Shira: Introduction and Critical Edition* (Ph.D dissertation, The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, 1966), 57- 66; M. R. Niehoff, "The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996), 249, n. 249 who notes that the rabbinic conception of the animal world is indicative of a more pervasive mythological thinking, than what is found in the Hebrew Bible.

[51] This is based on a *semikhut parashiot* (adjacent sections) type of midrash, which here takes note that in the biblical narrative, Sarah's death is reported at the beginning of the section (Gen. 23:1 ff.), closely following the story of the Offering of Isaac (Gen. 22:1-19). On the whole complex of legends about Sarah's death, see Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, *Genesis: The Beginning of Desire* (Philadelphia, 1995), 123-36.

[52] See *Va-Yiqra Rabbah* 20:2 (ed. Margulies, 447-9 and parallels). Here Sarah clearly knows that Isaac has not been killed. Sarah's question to Isaac (in Aramaic): "Where have you been, my son?" in this version, should be compared to her question in the version discussed more fully below. Also note that here Sarah shows how distraught she is by wailing like a shofar. This

later) versions, it is Satan who tells Sarah about what is transpiring on Mt. Moriah.[53] It is this version which seems to be portrayed in a fascinating medieval Jewish illumination of the *Aqedah* scene from the Regensburg Pentateuch (Figure 4).[54]

Figure 4

version is altogether more aural and less visual. In effect, it supplies the "sound-track" to the "silent film" I construct in the continuation.

[53] *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* 32 (72b). Compare *Midrash Ha-Gadol* to Gen. 19:19 where, when Abraham returns alone, Sarah sees that Isaac is missing and says "Now the word of Satan is true that he said that Isaac was killed"; whereupon she dies. In *Sefer Ha-Yashar*, Satan appears in the guise of an old man. and Sarah dies for joy when learning that the sacrifice had not really taken place; see *Legends of the Jews*, I, 286 and n. 256.

[54] Regensberg (Ratisbon) Pentateuch, Jerusalem, Israel Museum MS 180/52, folio 18v,b (Bavaria, c. 1300). See Gabrielle Sed-Rajna, The Hebrew Bible in Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts (New York, 1987), 48, figure 43; also reproduced in Jo Milgrom, "Giving Eve's Daughters Their Due," (review of Dorothee Salle, et al., *Great Women of the Bible in Art and Literature* [Grand Rapids, 1994]) *Bible Review* (February, 1996), 36.

Note that here Satan is portrayed, not as telling, but as showing Sarah, which he does by holding and raising Sarah in his arms, as if to force her to watch the ghastly proceedings from an elevated viewpoint. Sarah raises her arms in a gesture of horror at this grizzly sight. Significantly, the artist has depicted Abraham and Isaac in a separate boxed frame from Satan and Sarah, apparently to indicate that they are not actually present where the sacrifice is taking place, but that Sarah is being shown by Satan some kind of super-sensual vision. This is perhaps about as close as graphic art can come to portraying "seeing with the mind".

Midrash can achieve a similar effect, but by using the rhetorical means of verbal artistry. This can be seen most clearly in a third midrashic tradition about the death of Sarah,[55] which inventively combines the two alternate versions mentioned above, that either Satan or Isaac himself informs Sarah.

Satan went to Sarah and appeared to her in the guise of Isaac. When she saw him, she said to him: My son, what did your father do to you? He answered her: My father took me over mountains and down valleys, and he brought me up to the summit of a high mountain, and he built an altar, and he prepared a sacrificial pyre, and he laid out the firewood. And he bound me on top of the altar. And he took the knife to slaughter me. And if the Holy One, blessed be He, had not said to him: "Lay not thy hand upon the boy" (Gen. 22:12), I would already have been slaughtered. He did not finish the report, before her (Sarah's) soul departed.

Note Sarah's question: "My son, what did your father do to you?" Something unusual in Isaac's appearance seems to prompt this particular formulation of the mother's query. The midrash subtly suggests that it is immediately clear to Sarah, even before Isaac begins speaking, that his father has abused him in some way.[56] It is this, I suggest, that the midrash

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[55] *Tanchuma* Va-Yera 23 (from the Mantua edition and later editions based on it); see also *Qohelet Rabbah* 9:7. The *Tanchuma* version was selected (with a good literary sense for drama) by Bialik and Ravnisky to represent this tradition in *Sefer Ha-Aggadah*, see there p. 32.

[56] I am grateful to my student Jennifer Clayman (Midrash, Kitah Bet, Fall 1997) for having made me realize this when she wrote on an exam containing this midrashic text: "What did your father do to you? I imagine her [Sarah] crying out in a kind of anguished surprise and

invites us to visualize graphically for ourselves, but by looking, as it were, through the eyes of the mother who perceives that her child has suffered some emotional or physical trauma.[57] How might Satan make himself appear as a young man who had very nearly been murdered by his father, in order to most effectively horrify his doting mother?[58] Note that here the midrash does not describe how Satan in the guise of Isaac looked, but only stimulates us to imagine this for ourselves.[59] Isaac's answer to his mother's question, detailing what his father did to him on a kind of "forced march", aids us in forming such a mental picture.[60] The illustrator of the Regensburg Pentateuch depicts Sarah being shown by Satan what is transpiring at the site of the sacrifice as a kind of snapshot image. But the midrash rolls before our mind's eye an animated narrative of Isaac's exhausting journey to its near fatal denouement on Mt. Moriah. If we fully engage in this aggadic narrative—as I believe the authors of the midrash would have liked us to do—we can imagine a cinematic presentation of young Isaac being dragged by his cruel father over hill and dale for three

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wonder what it was about Satan—acting as Isaac's appearance—that caused her extreme reaction".

[57] Here again it would be appropriate to employ the literary terminology of "focalization" (see above, note 30). Sarah serves as the "focalizer", (i.e. we see the scene through her eyes) and the traumatized Isaac is what is being "focalized".

[58] For an extreme portrayal of Sarah's doting on Isaac before he sets off with Abraham to Moriah, see *Sefer Ha-Yashar* (Va-Yera).

[59] In both graphic and literary art, it is often considered a greater achievement to stimulate the imagination of the target audience than to create a totally clear and unambiguous depiction (see above, note 33). For contemporary literary theory, see Roland Barthes' brief essay, "Striptease," in his collection of essays, *Mythologies* , selected and translated by Annette Lavers (London, 1972), 84-87; Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* , 127-29 on "gaps"; for biblical studies, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Readings* (Bloomington, 1987), Index, 550-2, s.v. "gap", "gap-filling"; on the question of "indeterminacy" in midrashic literature, see David Stern, *Midrash and Theory: Ancient Jewish Exegesis and Contemporary Literary Studies* (Evanston, 1996), 15-38.

[60] In the parallel in *Qohelet Rabbah*, Abraham is actually described (by the midrashic "narrator") as having "taken Isaac up mountains and down valleys".

days and finally bound on an altar for sacrifice[61] —a demonic depiction of the *Aqedah* indeed![62] Note also that Sarah dies as she is "getting the picture" of what happened to her son. Here the midrash gives us another subtle but horrific hint of how intensively we might visualize this aggadic text. If we were indeed able to "see" what Sarah saw, if we were fully able to envision through the eyes of the mother the offering up for sacrifice of the son by his father, we too would die of horror, as did Sarah.

As a final example, let's look at what, according to the midrash, is actually transpiring on Mt. Moriah as Abraham is just about to sacrifice Isaac.

> "And he placed him on the altar" (Gen. 22:9). Abraham's eyes [were looking] into Isaac's eyes, and Isaac's eyes [were looking] into the heaven of heavens. And tears were flowing and falling from Abraham's eyes, until his whole height was awash in tears...[63] At that moment his

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[61] I imagine a visual flashback of the forced march, while in the sound-track, Isaac's emotive voice narrates the story (based on the midrashic text) in voiceover.

[62] See also the parallel in *Pirqe de-Rabbi Eliezer* 32 (72b) where Satan describes to Sarah how Isaac wept and wailed when he realized he could not be saved from slaughter. Note that this depiction contradicts the traditional rabbinic view that Isaac went of his own free-will to be sacrificed. However, according to one midrashic tradition Abraham held Isaac to prevent him from running away; see *Midrash Ha-Gadol* to Gen. 22:8 and the Geniza fragment published by J. Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue*, Vol. I (Cincinnati, 1940), Hebrew Section, 65-6.

[63] Here Abraham says to Isaac: "My son, since you have already given a quarter [log] of your blood, your Creator will arrange for you another sacrifice instead of you". I have removed this comment, since it seems to interrupt the logical consistency of the narrative. If Abraham knows and informs Isaac at this point that he is not going to die, why should they experience such an extreme emotional climax? The comment also requires considerable explanation to be comprehensible. On the quarter log of blood that Isaac shed on Mt. Moriah, see S. Spiegel, *The Last Trial* (New York, 1967), 46-8 and esp. note 7. Compare *Tanchuma* Va-Yera 23 (found in the Manuta edition and subsequent editions based on it): And [Abraham] took the knife in order to slaughter him [Isaac], until a quarter log of his blood went out (*yatzah*). But it is also entirely possible to vocalize the three Hebrew letters, *Y-Tz-H*, as *yetzeh* (i.e. the imperfect tense of this verb), which would yield a very different understanding of the passage: "...until a quarter of his blood **would go out**." Compare also *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Yishmael*, ed. Lauterbach I, 57: "And when I see the blood" (Exod. 12:13). I see the blood of the sacrifice of Isaac (see there Lauterbach's note 7). God's "seeing the blood" of the pascal sacrifice on the doorposts of the Israelite home, which causes God to "pass over" them on the night of the

> [Abraham's] mouth gaped open in a cry and he bellowed a great moan. And his eyes were rolled back[64] and gazing up at the *Shekhinah* ("divine presence"). And he lifted up his voice and said, "I lift mine eyes to the mountains; whence will my help come? From the Lord, maker of Heaven and Earth" (Ps. 121:1-2). [Isaac lifted up his eyes and beheld the Chambers of the Chariot; he trembled and was shaken.] [65] At that moment, "Behold, the mighty ones shall cry outside; ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly" (Isa. 33:7). The ministering angels stood row upon row in the firmament,[66] saying to one another: Look! One who is unique is slaughtering; and one who is unique is being slaughtered...Immediately [the Angel said to Abraham]: "Do not send forth your hand against the boy" (Gen. 22:12).[67]

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plague of the first-born is here understood to be the blood which Isaac shed on Mt. Moriah. Notice that we have here another parade example of midrashic visualization: the animal blood God sees in Egypt is, in the eyes of the midrash, a visualized projection of the human blood shed during the actual(!) sacrifice of Isaac on Mt. Moriah.

[64] Compare *Tosefta* Chullin 2:11-12: "if the ox bellowed when it was about to be slaughtered it is [still] ritually fit...if it rolled back its eyes when it was about to be slaughtered it is [still] ritually fit". In our text Abraham, at the moment he was about to slaughter Isaac, shows signs typical of an animal which itself is about to be slaughtered.

[65] See *Tanchuma Buber* Toledot 22. For the term "chambers of the chariot" in the development of *Hekhalot* and *Merkavah* literature, see J. Dan, "Chadrey ha-Merkavah," *Tarbitz* 47 (1978), 49-55 [Hebrew].

[66] Note that the angels are pictured as "standing [in heaven] and weeping" in the climactic scene of the *Aqedah* already in the Qumran version and continue to appear in versions preserved in Palestinian Targum and midrash (see above, note 17, Vermes, 142, n. 13).

[67] *Yalkut Shimoni* I, section 101, citing "midrash" (ed. Shiloni, Vol. 1, 446). In this version, there is no mention of what Isaac saw. This seems defective, since it is explicitly noted above that Isaac was looking into the "heaven of heavens". I have restored what seems to be missing here from the parallel version in *Tanchuma Buber* (see above, note 38); compare *Sefer Ha-Aggadah* 32. Compare the version found in *Midrash Ha-Gadol* to Gen. 22:9, 354: Abraham was crying and the Ministering Angels were shouting bitterly and crying with him, as it is said: "Behold, the mighty ones shall cry outside; ambassadors of peace shall weep bitterly" (Isa. 33:7). And Isaac gazed to the mountains, as it says: "I lift my eyes to the mountains; whence will my help come" (Ps. 121:1).

There is so much "eye-play" described in this midrashic passage,[68] that I suggest it can be read as a shooting-script for a film.[69] First we see the whole scene from an exterior camera angle. Abraham is bent over looking down at Isaac, who is lying on his back looking up into heaven. In the next "shot", we see the face of Isaac through the eyes of Abraham. What he sees in his son's face is so horrific that it caused him to weep to a surrealistic extent and to let out an inhuman cry. Isaac, shaking like a leaf, is, however, not returning our gaze, but rather looks past us, his eyes filled with dread and amazement. The shot through Abraham's eyes then pans up, following Isaac's gaze heavenward. And now we see what they see—a veritable *Merkavah* vision into the "Chambers of the Chariot". Here the camera's eye begins to slowly pan over angels standing row upon row in the heavenly firmament. And now we see the angels are looking at us and hear them cry out: "Look! One who is unique is slaughtering; and one who is unique is being slaughtered!" This angelic choral cry directs the camera's eye back to earth. Here, from an exterior camera angle, Abraham and Isaac are again seen, highlighted for an infinite moment in a freeze-frame, showing the father just about to plunge the knife into his son. And when the action begins again, peripeteia leads to denouement. One of the angels, we have seen above, suddenly appears to stay Abraham's hand, preventing him—at the last moment—from sacrificing his son. Seen this way, this midrashic text, and others like it, provide us with a very "moving picture".

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[68] Another parade example of "focalization" (see above, note 30).

[69] This is more literarily developed than what screenwriters sometimes call a "treatment" of narrative material (such as a novel) on which a film is to be based. This technique of visualizing literary text as shooting-script has been applied to the biblical narrative by Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield, 1983), Chapter 3, "Point of View," 43-61; for her treatment of the Binding of Isaac, see 44-5. See also J. Licht, *Story Telling in the Bible* (Jerusalem, 1978), 115-20 who describes the literary pace of the biblical narrative of the *Aqedah* in cinematic terms of fast and slow motion. Cinema is primarily visual; having begun as a "silent" medium. We still regard a "silent" film as cinema; but a film devoid of any visual component would be only a "sound-track".

In the examples presented and analyzed, I hope to have shown that midrash can be highly visual, indeed even cinematic, in its ability to combine both visual and verbal elements to animate the biblical text. Kirk Douglas said: "The Torah is the best script I have ever read."[70] It remains for us to see with the sages the "talkie" they produced and directed.

Appendix I: Visualization as "Spiritual-Psychological" Seeing"

"You too saw with the understanding of your heart and your mind and your soul" (see note 1). David Halperin compares this expression with the idea that "seeing" (the Merkavah Chariot) is dependent on "the understanding of the heart" (*ba-avanta' de-liba'* , B. Megillah 24b) and with Origen's distinction (*First Homily on Ezekiel* I:8) between contemplating with the "eyes of the heart" (*cordis oculis*) and observing with the "eyes of the flesh" (*oculis carnis*); see his *The Faces of the Chariot: Early Jewish Responses to Ezekiel's Vision* (Tuebingen, 1988), 317, 333-5; "Origen, Ezekiel's Merkabah, and the Ascension of Moses," *Church History* 50 (1981), 273-4; *The Merkabah in Rabbinic Literature* (New Haven, 1980), 174-75. Compare Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven and London, 1988), 90, who cites R. Nathan of Rome (*Arukh ha-Shalem* , ed. Kohut, 1:14, s.v. *Â?avney shaysh*) referring to the ancient mystics as those who "see and envision in the chamber of their heart like a man who sees and envisions something clearly with his eyes, and they hear and tell and speak by means of a seeing eye by the divine spirit". See also Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1994), 110, note 154, who notes the expressions "vision [which is the] perception of the mind" (from "The Armenian Vision of Ezekiel") and "gazing upon the likeness of God with the eyes of the heart or mind" (from the *Corpus Hermeticum*). All of these scholars note the psychological aspect of such "seeing". The special kind

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[70] Kirk Douglas, *Climbing the Mountain: My Search for Meaning* (New York, 1997), 140 [photo caption]; see also 144 (his advice to film students at University of Southern California) "Study the Torah–all the best scripts are there. Whatever dramatic device you can dream up, God thought of it first" and 145: "the best scripts come from Torah".

of "seeing" described in these texts is the best expression I have found in pre-modern sources for what I mean by "visualization" (though without any necessary mystical overtones). Modern Hebrew has adopted *hachazayah* for "visualization", A. Even-Shoshan, *Ha-Milon he-Chadash* (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 259, s.v.

Appendix II: Bibliographical Postscript

Daniel Boyarin, "The Eye in the Torah: Ocular Desire in Midrashic Hermeneutic," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990), 532-50, is to be credited with opening the discussion of the importance of "seeing" in midrash. However, Boyarin asserts that midrashic reading is not with "the eyes of the mind"; but rather that "eyes of flesh saw God in history" (539). This connects with Boyarin's main point about the essential corporeality of God in Rabbinic thinking; as opposed to the Platonic universe "in which God is incorporeal, cannot be seen with eyes of flesh, and can only be rendered in language by figures that make Him seem visible to the "eyes of the mind". Boyarin correctly calls attention to the "shift from aural to visual" in the context of an extremely important insight. The midrashic tendency to interpret demonstrative pronouns (such as the word "this) in the biblical text as "pointing" (deixis), invokes a visual object (535, see also 546). On this method of interpretation, see M. Fox, "Ke'ilu Be-Etzba—Toledot ha-Nusach shel Bitui le-Harchaqat ha- Hagshamah," *Tarbitz* 49 (1980), 278-91 expanding on an unpublished paper by Marc Bregman (see there nn. 8, 19, 31). I am less convinced than Boyarin seems to be that an object of vision must necessarily indicate some physical (or in the case of God, "corporeal") entity. This is related to my choice of the term "visualization" to express a more "spiritual" or "psychological" kind of "seeing".

The discussion of visualization, particularly as reflected in medieval Jewish mysticism, has been continued by Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*; see particularly Chapter I "Israel: the One Who Sees God"—Visualization of God in Biblical, Apocalyptic, and Rabbinic Sources". Wolfson also deals with visualization in classical rabbinic

culture, in his outstanding follow-up study, "Iconic Visualization and the Imaginal Body of God: The Role of Intention in the Rabbinic Conception of Prayer," *Modern Theology* 12 (1996), 135-62. I also had the privilige of hearing Wolfson's recent presentation, "Imagining the Imageless: Iconic Representations of the Divine in Kabbalah" at the conference on "Iconotrophism: Turning toward Pictures", held at Bar-Ilan University, March 23-25, 1998. Like Boyarin, Wolfson focuses primarily on the visualization of God; but his treatment of the question of divine corporeality or incorporeality is more nuanced; see the conclusion of the aforementioned article (152): "the rabbinic notion of incarnation embraces the paradox that God's body is physical only to the extent that it is mental and it is mental only to the extent that it is physical". On the pervasiveness of paradox in rabbinic thinking, see the important study by A. J. Lelyveld, *The Unity of the Contraries: Paradox as a Characteristic of Normative Jewish Thought* (The B. G. Rudolph Lectures in Judaic Studies; Syracuse, N. Y.: Syracuse University, 1984).