

The Witness of the Ram (Genesis 22)

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I am caught in this thicket
as my counterpart is bound
in cords. He is entangled
by design, I in these sticks

by accident. Neither of us
wrestles; in our doomsday prime
we weigh the heavy time
before a foreign voice shall choose

which of us shall live, and which
shall die. No one here chooses
dying. Not the father, wizened
but free, his own neck unslit, arched

to breach his last son's breath,
worshiping a voice that asks
such an earthquake trial, bone-wrenching task
of faith; nor the quieted youth

lashed supine in stupor, gazing
at his father's purpling throat;
nor I, wanting my ewe to mate,
and my kids on their grass slopes, grazing.

My fleece unclipped, my haste of joy
have cinched me. Here am I, now:
contending for death, endowed
with stately bounce and grace. And the boy? —

unmeasured his attributes.

Between different mammals the voice
will choose: the smooth-cheeked face
to kiss, the hairy beast to slight.

The voice will point to what
the father rampant has not seen,
devout to kill his kin and line:
my whorled, spiraling horns not caught,

my crowning circlets raised above
this bramble where birds nest.
He will judge me fit for God's feast;
my dark-glossed horns, trophies to save

from my ash of sacrifice.

Others will say: the voice demanded
incense of ram, not odor of men —
my scapegoat blood a paradise

to offer (as if their harvest grains
did not suffice), so that
their bloods might be preserved unlet.
And when they sound my horns, my stain

of death will smudge their sacred days
of ritual, their laws of cult.

My trumpets will exalt
their festivals; and they garner praise,

cleansed by my holocaust. But few
will then recall that I did see
with certainty the father rise,
ready with his blade, his rue

tacit, the son without a scribe
to scratch the blotches of his thought,
and both hobbled victims brought
to servitude: disabled.

They will wonder at their trouble
to press sound through my hollowed horns.
Why should I cry with ease for them? They should strain,
burst reddening cheeks and lungs, burble

to recompense my life they cut.

Humanoid and upright
like their god out of sight,
they will otherwise forget.

They do not know that blood
of mine will never stanch the shed
of blood they seek in secret, so bright the beads
and drops, glistening when they freshly flood.



Dr. Daniel A. Harris has published some of his poems in *Midstream*, *Kerem*, *Living Text*, and *Poetica*. He is the founder of *Jewish Voices: 200 Years of Poetry in English*, an educational program that has been sponsored by more than 350 synagogues and other Jewish cultural sites (www.jewishvoices.org). The author of books on William Butler Yeats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Alfred Tennyson, he has recently published articles on the Anglo-Jewish poets Grace Aguilar and Isaac Rosenberg.