

## **Eschatology, Violence, and Suicide: An Early Rabbinic Theme and Its Influence in the Middle Ages**

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I  
‘Who is like thee, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like thee, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?’, cried out Moses and the people of Israel in their famous Song, at the Sea, as we all know it from the fifteenth chapter of the book of Exodus. The wonders referred to, were, obviously, those great miracles to which the Israelites were witnesses during their last few days since they had escaped from Egypt, above all, the split of the sea itself. The rabbinic commentary on the Song, however, that which was composed during the second or third century in Palestine, and is known as the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishma’el, emphasizes that ‘It is not written here “Who did wonders,” but “who does wonders” – in the future.’<sup>1</sup> Indeed, even though the Song itself begins with the word ‘Then’, which points to a past event, the Mekhilta stresses that the word ‘then’ may refer not only to times past, but, also, to times in the future. Thus, right at its very beginning, the rabbinic commentary sets forth the notion that the biblical text should be understood not only as a description of past events, but also as a prophecy to the future.<sup>2</sup> In fact, as noted by Judah Goldin, ‘no reader of [the Mekhilta] can fail to recognize that what is astir in the minds of the [rabbis] was not only – one may dare to say, not mainly – the event in ancient history, but also the immediate and poignant reflections produced by historical experiences in their, the Sages’, times.’<sup>3</sup>

How is this being done? The above quoted passage demonstrates, that the rabbis read the verb “doing” in the biblical verse literally. Consequently, they were able to give emphasis to the fact, that it appears in the present tense – “doing wonders” – which may, in Rabbinic usage, be understood as referring to the future as well.<sup>4</sup>

This method of reading the Song, however, was more than a hermeneutic exercise; it had a political function. For a similar (and therefore related) midrash – both methodologically and contently – is found in several other occasions in the Mekhilta, in which the political agenda is made quite explicit. Thus, we read in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishma’el:

I. ‘Thou breakest down them that rise up against thee’ – it is not written here hast broken down them that rise up against Thee’, but ‘Thou shalt break down them that rise up against Thee’ – in the Age to Come. As it is said: ‘Break their teeth in their mouth’ etc (Ps 58:6). Why so? ‘Because they give no heed to the works of the Lord, nor to the operation of His hands. He will break them down and not build them up’ (Ps 28:5). He will break them down in this world, and he will not build them up in the World to Come.

II. ‘Thou sendest forth Thy wrath’ – it is not written here ‘Thou hast sent forth Thy wrath’, but ‘Thou shalt send forth Thy wrath’ – in the Age to Come. As it is said, ‘Pour out Thine indignation upon them’ etc. (Ps 69:25). It also says, ‘Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations’ etc. (Jer 10:25). Why so? ‘For they have devoured Jacob’ (ibid.)

III. ‘It consumeth them as stubble’ – it is not written here ‘It hath consumed them as stubble’, but ‘will consume them as stubble’ – in the Age to Come. As it is said, ‘And the house of Jacob shall be a fire’ (Obad 18). It also says, ‘In that day will I make the chiefs of Judah like a pan of the fire among wood, and like a torch of fire’ etc. (Zech 12:6).<sup>5</sup>

This is a homily on Exodus, 15:7, which reads: ‘Thou breakest down them that rise up against thee; Thou sendest forth Thy wrath; It consumeth them as stubble’. The author focuses on the tenses of the verbs in this verse, which, morphologically, are in the future. In the context of Biblical poetry the use of the future tense can refer to a past event that reveals a continuing and everlasting ability. God is said here to be capable, whenever he wishes, to send forth his wrath against his enemies. The midrash, however, highlights the literal reading of the verbs, and therefore is able to arrive at the conclusion that Scripture says something about God’s actions in the future. To be more precise: in the far future, in the eschatological age, or, to use the midrash’s own words, ‘in the Age to Come.’ Our midrash claims, therefore, that in ‘the Age to Come’ God will exercise his revenge upon his enemies.

About whom does the midrash speak? To whom does it refer? The homilist mentions ‘the nations’ that ‘have devoured Jacob.’ These are allusions to Jeremiah 10:25, and in order to understand the reference we need to read the verse in its entirety. The preceding words of that verse are: ‘And devoured him, and consumed him, and have made his habitation desolate.’ In the years in which this midrash was composed – that is, in the second or third century CE – there was only one nation to which the Rabbis could have referred as having “consumed” Israel; that was obviously Rome. Indeed, the words ‘His habitation’ in that verse are understood by the Mekhilta itself (as well as by other Rabbinic sources) as referring to the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>6</sup> This too supports our understanding of the use of this verse from Jeremiah by our midrash as a reference to the Roman Empire.

This is made clear in the second section, where the homilist cites Obadiah verse 18, in which ‘the house of Jacob’ and ‘the house of Joseph’ are said to kindle ‘the house of Esau...and devour them and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau.’ The use of this verse leaves no room for doubt, about whom our midrash speaks; for ‘Esau’ is the standard appellation for the Roman Empire in rabbinic literature.<sup>7</sup>

In fact, this identification is made explicit in another passage in the Mekhilta, which follows a similar literary pattern:

'[Your right hand] shatters the foe' (Ex 15:6) – it does not say 'has shattered the foe' but 'will shatter the foe' – in the Age to Come. As it is said, 'You will march through the earth in indignation' etc. (Hab 3:12). 'Shatters the foe' – to wit, Pharaoh, as it is said, 'the foe said' (Ex 15:9). According to another interpretation it is Esau, as it is said, 'Because the foe hath said' (Ezek 36:2).<sup>8</sup>

As in the above midrash, here too the midrash focuses on the tense of the verb. 'Shatters' is in the future, and this, the midrash says, indicates that Scripture did not speak of past events – as we normally understand the Song – but rather it speaks about the future. According to this reading, the verse expresses the idea that God will – that is 'in the Age to Come' – shatter the enemy. But who is the enemy? According to one interpretation it is Pharaoh, but this cannot go hand in hand with the claim of the midrash that the verse speaks of the future, so we must infer that our midrash assumed the second interpretation – the one which explicitly took 'the foe' to refer to Esau. Since, again, 'Esau' in rabbinic literature is not the biblical figure but an appellation for Rome, we understand that our midrash, when speaking of the future revenge that God will take upon 'the enemy', refers to the Roman Empire.

The fact that the midrash has a concrete and actual enemy in mind, which was a very 'real' enemy of Palestinian Jews in the days in which this midrash was composed, shows that we are not dealing with mere hermeneutical gymnastics, playing on a linguistic peculiarity of the biblical text. What we have here is a series of homilies that view the past redemption as paradigmatic. In other words, the rabbis suggest that the future redemption of the Jewish people will be structurally similar to that which is portrayed by the biblical narrative. As with the Egyptians, who 'sank as lead in mighty waters' (Ex 15:10), so too will be the fate of the Romans.<sup>9</sup> This, I will argue, is not a construction of a religious concept ('The Final Redemption') for its own sake; it does a certain political job.

## II

The latter midrash is a midrash on the verse 'Thou breakest down them that rise up against thee'. And these very words are interpreted a few passages earlier in the same rabbinic work, the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishmael, as referring to Israel: 'And who are they who rise against Thee? The ones who rise up against Thy children.'<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, says the midrash:

It is not written here 'Thou overthrowest them that rise up against us', but 'Thou overthrowest them that rise up against Thee'; Scripture is declaring that whenever anyone rises up against Israel, it is as though he is rising up against Him Who Spoke and the World Came to Be.<sup>11</sup>

This, the midrash claims, is corroborated by a verse in Zechariah as it was interpreted by Rabbi Judah:

'Surely he who touches you touches the apple of his eye' (Zech 2:8) – Rabbi Judah says: It does not say here: 'The apple of the eye,' but: 'The apple of his eye,' referring, as it were, to the One above, but Scripture modifies the expression.<sup>12</sup>

Rabbi Judah claims that the expression 'his eye' refers to God's eye – as if it were written 'my eye' – and not to the plain subject of that verse, namely 'the one who touches you' (therefore to be translated 'his own eye'). We need not bother ourselves here with the question of whether Rabbi Judah possessed any reliable tradition regarding the precise text of the biblical verse, on which he had founded such a reading.<sup>13</sup> What is of importance in our context is that not only is the Mekhilta interpreting the Song at the Sea as speaking of Israel's enemies in its own days – that is, the Roman Empire – but it identifies Israel's enemies as God's enemies.<sup>14</sup>

By doing so the midrash elevates the political and military struggle between Israel and Rome to a heavenly degree, and this is an important shift. For, on the one hand, it places Rome's crime on a much higher level than an earthly action against 'us', the Jewish people, thereby strongly intensifying it. On the other hand, however, the midrash removes the authority to carry out any act of revenge from the hands of those who actually suffer from those enemies – namely, the Jews of the land of Israel, of the author's days – and grants it exclusively to God, in the eschatological future.

Such a move is clearly made by the tannaitic midrash to Deuteronomy, the Sifre, which presumably was edited at approximately the same time as the Mekhilta:

'Vengeance is Mine and recompense' (Deut 32:35) – I will punish them Myself. Not through an angel and not through a sent one – according to the matter of which Scripture states: 'Come now and I will send you to Pharaoh' (Ex 3:10), and Scripture also says: 'And the angel of the Lord went forth and smote the camp of the Assyrians' (2 Kings 19:35).<sup>15</sup>

The midrash stresses the word 'mine' in the biblical text, which is taken to express the idea that vengeance will be executed by God himself, not by any agent or a human being. One might think of reading this as a good promise – recalling a similar passage in the Haggadah of Passover<sup>16</sup> – yet it cannot be denied that the ultimate punishment is left by this midrash to God alone.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the possibility to actively "punish" Israel's enemies (i.e. to take any military action against them) in God's name is being ideologically blocked. He, and He alone will execute vengeance.

## III

The two aspects of the Rabbinic move are logically connected; since the crime is a crime against God, the execution of the punishment too is left to Him. The midrash, however, moves a step further; it associates God's judgement of the nations who harmed Israel, and his vengeance, with the establishment of His kingdom and Israel's final redemption – that is to say: it places it in the eschatological age, when the kingship of God will be revealed. Thus we read in the Mekhilta:

Rabbi Eli'ezer<sup>18</sup> says: When will the name of these people be blotted out? At the time when idolatry will be eradicated together with its worshippers, and God will be recognized throughout the world as the One, and His kingdom will be established for all eternity. For at

that time, 'shall the Lord go forth and fight' (Zech 14:3); 'And the Lord shall be king' etc. (ibid 9). And it also says: 'Thou wilt pursue them in anger and destroy them' etc. (Lam 3:66).<sup>19</sup>

This is a midrash on God's pledge, 'I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven' (Ex 17:14). Amalek is seen by various Rabbinic sources as a descendent of Esau, and like the latter he is frequently identified with Rome.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore fair to assume that when Rabbi Eli'ezer refers to 'these people' he speaks of the Romans. The precise character of the Heavenly vengeance is very clear; it has to do with a total eradication of the nations by God, to the degree that their name will be blotted out. Rabbi Eli'ezer's midrash, however, connects the Heavenly revenge and God's kingship; the former will happen after the establishment of the latter, that is: "in the Age to Come".<sup>21</sup> Similarly, according to Rabbi Joshua, who was a contemporary of Rabbi Eli'ezer, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, will sit upon the throne of His kingdom and His reign will prevail, at that time "the Lord will have war with Amalek" (Ex 17:16).<sup>22</sup>

In the same line of thought, but in a reverse order, the Mekhilta interprets the sequence of the verses in Exodus 15:18 – 19:

"The Lord shall reign for ever and ever" (Ex 15:18) – For what reason? "For the horses of Pharaoh went in [the sea]" (ibid 19).<sup>23</sup>

Here too, God's reign is connected with the extermination of the enemy. However, the order of events is reversed; the former is dependent on the latter.<sup>24</sup> Similarly we read in the Sifre to Deuteronomy:

'For He avenges the blood of His servants, and takes vengeance on His adversaries' (Deut 32:43) – Two vengeance He takes; vengeance on murder and vengeance on theft. And from whence do we know that all thefts which the Gentile Nations of the World committed against Israel are accounted unto them as if they had spilled innocent blood? As it is said, 'I will gather all the nations and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat and I will enter into judgement with them there for My people Israel' (Joel 3:2), 'Egypt shall be a desolation and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the theft against the children of Judah, because they have shed innocent blood in their land' (ibid 19).<sup>25</sup>

The theme is the same as we have already seen: God will judge the nations – Edom, which, for the Rabbis, is Rome, is explicitly mentioned – and will destroy them. Why? The reason is, as we are explicitly told in a parallel midrash found in the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishma'el, not on account of their 'practices of idolatry, of incest and of murder, but it says "For My people and My heritage Israel whom they have scattered among the nations" (Joel 4:2).<sup>26</sup> All this, by now, is fairly well known. But the midrash in the Sifre immediately proceeds to say:

At the very moment: "But Judah shall be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation" (Joel 4:20). "And I will avenge their blood that I have not avenged, and the Lord dwelleth in Zion" (ibid 21).<sup>27</sup>

Here too we see a connection of the Heavenly vengeance and the establishment of God's kingship; first comes the former, then appears the latter. Moreover, God's vengeance is inherently connected, according to this midrashic reading of Joel, with the re-inhabitation of Judah and God's return to dwell in Zion – in other words: with the final redemption of the Jewish people.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the hopes for redemption are connected with the execution of God's vengeance.<sup>29</sup>

All this, however, is left solely to God. He, and only He, will execute the vengeance upon the nations, and this will take place only in the far future, in the eschatological age.

#### IV

To be sure, the association of Israel's redemption with God's vengeance upon the nations has its roots already in the Old Testament. Thus, Trito-Isaiah speaks of 'the day of vengeance' and of 'the year of my deliverance', which has come, in the same verse (Isa 63:4). As noted by H.G.L. Peels, 'The vengeance is so closely related to the redemption of God's people that, without any hint of tension, the notion of God's vengeance can play a crucial role in texts that deal exclusively with the salvation of Zion'.<sup>30</sup> In such texts, the 'way to Zion' (Isa 35:8) is not opened as long as God has not executed his vengeance upon the nations.<sup>31</sup>

This idea continued to live in the hearts and minds of Jews during the Second Temple period as well.<sup>32</sup> Thus, in Nehemiah's prayer, as recorded in 2Macc. 1:27–29, the request from God to 'Put to torment the oppressors and the arrogant perpetrators at our outrage' is immediately followed by 'Plant Your people in Your holy place.' In other words, we see here a connection between the punishment of the oppressors and the redemption of Israel.

In passages such as Isaiah 34–35 the 'enemies' are identified specifically with 'Edom.' A connection between Edom's destruction and the deliverance of Israel can be found in various other 'Edom oracles' in the Old Testament.<sup>33</sup> Once 'Edom' was identified, during the Second Temple period, with Rome, the association of the final deliverance of the Jewish people with the destruction of the Roman Empire was unavoidable. As was shown by Martin Hengel, such an expectation was indeed central in the ideology of the Zealots, since the death of Herod the Great until the destruction of the Second Temple.<sup>34</sup> And the midrashic material proves that these expectations did not disappear in the following generations.

The rabbinic move, where an ancient deeply-rooted idea was highlighted by some midrashic sources, cannot therefore be considered innovative in its main message. It had, however, a remarkably important political function: by assigning the vindication to God, and by placing it in the eschaton, the Rabbis have neutralized – and therefore practically nullified – their followers' hopes for an imminent revenge to be taken upon their enemies. In other words, they suppressed anti-Roman military activist inclinations, that were common among the Jews of Palestine during all those years.<sup>35</sup>

It stands to reason that there was a historical background to this move. The failure of the Jews in their war against Rome in 70 CE,

and sixty five years later, in the Bar-Kochba revolt of 132–135 CE, made it clear to many of the Rabbis not only that defeating the Roman Empire by military means was an impossibility, but also that the price – that is: the loss of the lives of hundreds of thousands of people – was too high. They realized that the anti-Roman inclinations, shared by many Jews since the Roman conquest of Jerusalem in 63 BCE, have a dangerous potential for leading the Jewish people into an endless clash with Rome, and they saw it as their duty to fight against these tendencies. For that purpose they have promulgated an ideology of political passivity, as the one advocated by the Mekhilta of Rabbi Ishma'el:

Rabbi Meir says: 'The Lord will fight for you' (Ex 14:14) – if even when you stand there silent the Lord will fight for you, how much more so when you render praise to Him. Rabbi says: 'The Lord will fight for you and you shall remain silent' (ibid) – shall God perform miracles and mighty deeds for you, and you be standing there silent? The Israelites then said to Moses: Moses, our teacher, what is there for us to do? And he said to them: You should be exalting, glorifying and praising, uttering songs of praise, adoration and glorification to Him in whose hands are the fortunes of wars, just as it is said: 'Let the high praises of God be in their mouth' (Ps 149:6). And it also says: 'Be Thou exalted, O God, above the heavens; Thy glory be above all the earth' (Ps 57:12). And it also says: 'O Lord, Thou art my God, I will exalt Thee' (Isa. 25:1). At that moment the Israelites opened their mouths and recited the song: 'I will sing unto the Lord, for He is highly exalted' etc. (Ex 15:2).<sup>36</sup>

There is no disagreement between the two sages with regards to the message of the biblical verse, only with regards to its punctuation. Rabbi Meir reads the verse in a descriptive manner, and draws the conclusion that if indeed God does fight for Israel while they are silent, how much more will He do wars for them if they give praise to Him. Rabbi (that is Rabbi Judah the Prince), on the other hand, reads the verse as a rhetorical question: 'Shall God perform miracles and mighty deeds for you, and you be standing there silent?' Surely not, says Rabbi, and therefore he suggests that the Israelites were required to 'do' something. The thing which Israelites are expected to 'do', however, is one and the same as the thing to which Rabbi Meir refers, that is: to give praise to God. To be sure, this does not seem to be the plain meaning of the biblical verse itself, where the Israelites were expected to shut up altogether. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the only 'act' they are encouraged by Moses to take (according to this rabbinic interpretation) is that of praise to the Lord. If read politically, therefore, this midrash should be seen as a call for acts of devotion,<sup>37</sup> that is: military and political passivity.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, I suggest, the midrashic placement of the vengeance to be taken upon the nations in the far future has replaced the hopes for the vanquishing of the actual, felt, enemy with passive eschatological expectations that the Roman Empire will be demolished by God "in the Age to Come."<sup>39</sup>

When compared to the activist spirit of the rebels against Rome, this ideology of military passivity can be seen as an ideological revolution.<sup>40</sup> Such revolutions, however, do not take place by night, and it takes them a long time to achieve dominance. Established views are never uprooted at once, and the ability to change religious value-hierarchies profoundly is always limited. The case of the rabbinic neutralization of activist attitudes towards the Romans (by means of attributing the nations' eradication to God alone, and its placement in the eschaton, as described above) did not cause these attitudes to disappear, and it did not uproot violent tendencies towards the enemy, such as those that were prevalent among Palestinian Jews during the Roman era. Quite to the contrary; the construction of the eschatological redemption in terms of the total eradication of the nations, or at least in association with such an expectation, has a potential of shaping a violent personality and might contribute to the producing of a violent mind-setting. For if one is hoping for God's redemption soon to come, and is inspired by the idea of a total vanquishing of Israel's enemies as an essential part of that redemption, one's violent inclinations are not entirely suppressed and in a sense they are being fostered.

## V

Such inclinations may spurt forth when time – the time – arrives, that is, in times of messianic expectations and outbreaks. This, I would like to suggest, was the case with Ashkenazic Jews (the Jews of Germany and France) in 1096, the year in which the first crusade began. The Christian messianic expectations implicated in that movement are widely recognized today,<sup>41</sup> but it should be noted that such expectations were widespread among Ashkenazic Jews of the same time as well.<sup>42</sup> This might shed light, at least to some extent, on the reactions of the Jews to the forced baptism that was about to be imposed on them, actively, by the Christian mob.<sup>43</sup>

According to the Jewish 'chronicles' of the time, which describe the events,<sup>44</sup> many of the Jews preferred to commit suicide rather than to be baptized to Christianity. In fact, many of them are told to have killed not only themselves but also their family members: their children, their brothers and sisters, and their parents.<sup>45</sup> Traditionally this extraordinarily extreme behavior is explained in terms of martyrology; in order to avoid baptism and christianization – which was considered by these Jews as idolatry – they preferred to die.<sup>46</sup> It is difficult to deny the centrality of this motivation, as it is the explicit explanation given not only by the Jewish sources but also by most of the Christians who witnessed such Jewish reactions in other cases throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>47</sup>

This explanation notwithstanding, the extreme violent character of these acts must be acknowledged. Indeed, as Donald W. Tiffany and Phillis G. Tiffany have noted, 'suicide and homicide are two sides of the same coin.'<sup>48</sup> This notion, which is implicit in many psychological discussions on suicide, goes back to Freud, who stresses that 'no neurotic harbours thoughts of suicide which he has not turned back upon himself from murderous impulses against others.'<sup>49</sup> Tiffany and Tiffany add that 'when the outlet of anger is curtailed, suicide is the only violent act available to disperse the rampaging anger.'<sup>50</sup> We may then view the acts of suicide and homicide of Ashkenazic Jews during the first crusade as a kind of acting out of violence.

Such a line of thought was pursued by David Flusser in a paper devoted to the suicide of the defenders of Massada. In that paper Flusser argued (just like Tiffany and Tiffany) that in cases where violent inclinations exist, and it is impossible for one to act out one's aggressive inclination, one might direct his, or her, violence towards one's self and commit suicide. This, Flusser suggested, might explain various cases of suicide among Palestinian Jews during the Jewish revolt against Rome during the years 66–73.<sup>51</sup> I wish to follow here a similar path and to view the acts of suicide and killing of others taken by the Jews of Ashkenaz in 1096 from the same perspective.<sup>52</sup> I do not deny the martyrological character of these acts, but the profound violence inherent in them calls for an additional explanation.<sup>53</sup> Where did such violence spring from?

Apparently, there were two roots for this violent inclination. On the one hand, there was the aggression and violence directed against the Jews by the Christian mob.<sup>54</sup> This violence could have nurtured a 'spirit of violence' among the Jews as well.<sup>55</sup> I would like to suggest, however, that the rabbinic tradition on which they grew contributed its part as well. Thus we read in the *Nitzzahon Vetus*, an anti-Christian polemical work, which was composed by an anonymous French Jew somewhere during the 13th century:

This [final] redemption will involve the ruin, destruction, killing, and eradication of all the nations, them, and the angels who watch over them, and their gods, as it is written, "The Lord shall punish the heavenly host in heaven and the kings of the earth of the earth" (Isa 24:21). Jeremiah too said, "Fear not, my servant Jacob, said the Lord, for I am with you; for I will make a full end of all the nations whither I have driven you, but with you I will not make a full end" (Jer 46:28). You see then, that God will destroy all the nations except Israel, as God promised us through Moses, "And yet for all that, when they will be in the land of their enemies I will not abhor them or reject them by destroying them utterly, thereby breaking my covenant with them" (Lev 26:44).<sup>56</sup>

This text demonstrates how profoundly embraced was the Late Antique midrashic vision of the final redemption, as we have seen it above, by Ashkenazic Jews in the middle ages. This is but one example, however. As has been recently shown by Israel J. Yuval, this theme was central in Ashkenazic sources.<sup>57</sup>

Had the relation between such texts and the early Rabbinic midrash been only thematic one could wonder about their roots. For, as we have seen, the rabbinic material itself has Biblical antecedents, and the language used by many of the sources utilized by Yuval undoubtedly goes back to various passages in the Old Testament. However, their literary dependence on the Rabbinic midrash can be shown by their appeal to midrashic ideas. Thus, in the following passage found in the Ashkenazic midrashic anthology, *Yalqut Shim'oni*, we read:

Our Rabbis said: every soul and soul that Esau has killed from among Israel, it is as if the Holy One, blessed be he, took from the blood of each soul and soul, and immerses his purfirion [Heavenly garment] in it until its color becomes red. And when the Day of Judgment arrives and He sits on a bema to judge him [Esau], He wears his purfirion and shows him the body of every righteous and righteous written on it, as it is said 'He will execute judgment among the nations, gilding them with corpses' (Ps 110:6). Immediately, the Holy One, blessed be he, takes upon him two acts of vengeance, as it is said 'O Lord, thou God of Vengeance, thou God of Vengeance, shine forth!' (Ps 94:1).<sup>58</sup>

The 'two acts of vengeance' are the 'two vengeancees' mentioned in the *Sifre to Deuteronomy* mentioned above.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in a liturgical poem composed by Rabbi Shim'on bar Yitzhak, who lived in the turn of the tenth century CE, we read: 'Avenge the blood and take revenge for the theft,'<sup>60</sup> and this is, again, an allusion to the same midrashic source.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the relation between the Ashkenazic material and the early midrashic sources cannot be denied. This Jewish tradition inherited one ancient rabbinic concept, and made it a paramount part of its vision of the final redemption.<sup>62</sup>

This is especially clear, as Yuval has convincingly shown, when put against the background of non-Ashkenazic Jewish sources (most notably Sepharadic – that is Spanish – sources), where the hopes for a Heavenly avenger are almost entirely absent. Instead, these sources portray the final redemption in terms of the joining of the nations with the Jewish people in their eschatological pilgrimage to the Mount of the Lord.<sup>63</sup> When these two visions are juxtaposed, the centrality of the vengeance theme in Ashkenazic culture becomes very clear. Thus, a concept which undoubtedly occupies only a partial role in Rabbinic literature moved to the center in the minds and hearts of some Jews of north-western Europe during the Middle Ages.<sup>64</sup>

The coloring of the final redemption in terms of eradication of the nations and a Heavenly vengeance upon them has, as pointed

out above, a potential of nourishing violent tendencies, and creating violent mind setting.<sup>65</sup> Such inclinations may therefore spurt forth in times of religious crises, or messianic outbreaks, such as those that have accompanied the first crusade. The Jews of France and Germany, however, lacked any political, or other, power to realize the violent leanings inherent in the rabbinic tradition on which they grew, leanings which, to be sure, were strongly nurtured by the violence directed towards them from the Christian environment. The only “psychological” path open for them was to act out their violence against themselves.

## VI

In her introduction to *Religious Violence Between Christian and Jews*, Anna Sapir Abulafia wrote:

Real dialogue between members of these two groups can only take place if those engaged in discussions know and respect the history and development of both religious/cultural traditions. This means that they must honestly confront, acknowledge and discuss the elements of both traditions which have had – and may still have – potential for engendering violence.<sup>66</sup>

In the present paper I have tried to do precisely such a thing. The fact that the Jews of Ashkenaz who committed suicide and even killed others in order to avoid baptism are usually seen in Jewish tradition as holy martyrs who have sanctified the Divine Name is well known. The presence of other voices within the Jewish tradition, who have condemned these acts, is much less recognized. That such voices were heard in Ashkenaz, however, is beyond any doubt, for in a twelfth century commentary on Genesis we read:

There is a report of a certain Rabbi who slaughtered many infants during a period of forced conversion, because he feared that they [the gentiles] would convert them. There was another Rabbi with him, who was exceedingly angry with him and called him a murderer, but he did not waver. The [second] Rabbi said: If I am correct, let that Rabbi be killed in an unusual way. Thus it was... Subsequently the persecution subsided. If he had not slaughtered those infants, they would have been saved.<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, the 13<sup>th</sup> century Ashkenazic work, *Sefer Hasidim*, restricts the call for Qiddush ha-Shem by claiming that it must not be carried out voluntarily:

Concerning that which is written, ‘I will be hallowed among the people of Israel’ (Lev 22:32) – this is only when the Gentiles coerce him: if he does not do so – and so they will kill him. And so it is written, ‘For Thy sake we are killed all the day long’ (Ps 44:23). If, however, he brought himself to be killed, concerning him it is written, ‘Surely your blood of your lives will I require’ (Gen 9:5). And it is also written, ‘Keep thy soul diligently’ (Deut 4:9).<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, a sensitive, critical reading of the Jewish chronicles of 1096 supports, in my mind, the assumption that such voices actually existed among the Jewish community. To be sure, the attitude of the authors of these ‘chronicles’ to the actions of suicide and homicide, taken by many of the Jews during the persecutions, is very complicated. On the one hand one tends to read these texts as positively evaluating these reactions. Consequently, it is customary to assume that the main objective of the authors was ‘to strengthen the weak,’ and to encourage Jews to follow a similar path in the future.<sup>69</sup>

On the other hand, however, as has been shown by Ivan Marcus, one finds in these chronicles a clear effort to justify these acts.<sup>70</sup> And the obvious question that arises is, in a Jewish religious setting why would anyone feel a need to justify an act of Qiddush ha-Shem, the sanctification of the Divine Name, which is in any case considered to be the highest degree of religious devotion? It must be assumed that the very need to do so reflects a widespread view of these acts as problematic, and that their legitimacy was disputed. As has been noted by Jeremy Cohen, one can detect in the ‘chronicles’ a voice of criticism of those who are said to have ‘sanctified the Divine Name,’ and not only a praise of their acts.<sup>71</sup>

It is even possible to go a step further. According to Peter Fonagy and Mary Target, ‘suicidal behaviour is perceived as the only feasible solution to an insoluble dilemma: the freeing of the self from the other through the destruction of the other within the self.’<sup>72</sup> Accordingly, one may dare to speculate that the profound violence exhibited by the acts of mass suicide and homicide of these Ashkenazic Jews may reflect, in some way, a deep unresolved cultural conflict that they had (within themselves) with regard to Christianity and their Christian neighbors, a conflict consisting of both aversion and attraction at the same time.<sup>73</sup> If so, on this reading, as much as the horrible events of spring 1096 express a deep strife between the Jews and their Christian neighbors, it also reveals the complexity of the attraction of both groups one to the other.

## Endnotes

\*I wish to express my gratitude to my friends, Steven Fraade, Ishai Rosen-Zvi, and Dror Yinon, who read an earlier draft of this paper and made valuable comments that improved both its shape and content. Thanks are to them; the responsibility remains mine.

<sup>1</sup> *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishma'el* (henceforth: MRI), Shirta, 8, in: H.S. Horovitz and I.A. Rabin, *Mekhilta D'Rabbi Ismael*, reprint Jerusalem, 1970, 144. For English translations see: J.Z. Lauterbach (translator), *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishma'el*, Philadelphia, 1933, 2.66; J. Goldin, *The Song at the Sea*, New Haven, 1971, p. 205. Throughout this paper I rely on Horovitz and Rabin's critical edition, and for the English I use both Lauterbach's edition as well as Goldin's translation.

<sup>2</sup> This is a recurring theme in tractate *Shirta* of the *Mekhilta*. Thus, for example: “For He is highly exalted” (Ex 15:1) – He *is* exalted and *will be* exalted in the future’ (Shirta, 2 [Horovitz-Rabin, 121; Lauterbach, 2.12; Goldin, 89]; cf.: *Mekhilta D'Rabbi Sim'on b. Jochai* [ed.

J.N. Epstein and E.Z. Melamed, Jerusalem, 1955, p. 74] [henceforth: MRS]; Midrash Tanhuma, ad loc.: ‘He is exalted in this world and He shall be exalted in the world to come’); ‘‘And He is become my salvation’’ (Ex 15:2) – means both: He was and He is. He was my salvation in the past and He will be my salvation in the future’ (Shirta, 3 [Horovitz-Rabin, 126; Lauterbach, 2.24; Goldin, 111]); ‘‘My Father’s God and I will exalt Him’’ (Ex. 15:2) – not only for the miracles which Thou hast performed for me will I utter song and praise before Thee, but for the miracles which Thou hast performed for my fathers and for me and for that which Thou wilt do for me in every generation’ (Shirta, 3 [Horovitz-Rabin, 128–129 (and see *variae lectiones* ad line 20); Lauterbach, 2.29; Goldin, 123]; cf. MRS, 80). See also: Beshalach, 2 (Horovitz-Rabin, 96; Lauterbach, 1.215 [and cf. MRS, 56]): ‘‘The Lord will battle for you’’ (Ex 14:14) – not only now but forever and ever He battles against your enemies.’

<sup>3</sup> Goldin (above, n. 1), introduction, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> In Mishnaic Hebrew, the present tense is used for the future. See M. Azar, *The Syntax of Mishnaic Hebrew*, Jerusalem, 1995, pp. 15–16 [in Hebrew].

<sup>5</sup> MRI, *Shirta*, 6 (Horovitz-Rabin, 136–137; Lauterbach, 2.47–48; Goldin 161–162). For the sake of convenience I added the Scriptural *lemmata* to which the midrash refers, in all three passages, in accordance with the reading of the *editio princeps*, even though it is not attested by the reading of the more reliable manuscripts of the Mekhilta. See the *variae lectiones* in Horovitz-Rabin’s edition, *ibid*.

<sup>6</sup> Especially important in our context is the Mekhilta’s own remark: ‘‘To Thy holy habitation’’ (Ex 15:13) – ... ‘‘habitation’’ is but a designation for the Temple, as in the passage ‘‘And laid waste His habitation’’ (Ps 79:7)’ (*Shirta*, 9 [Horovitz-Rabin, 146; Lauterbach, 2.70; Goldin, 216]). On the basis of this identification Rabbi Yosse the son of the Damascene interprets ‘And I will glorify Him’ in Ex. 15:2 to mean: ‘I will make for him a beautiful Temple, for the word *Naveh* designates the Temple, as in the passage ‘‘And laid waste His habitation’’’ (*Shirta*, 3 [Horovitz-Rabin, 127; Lauterbach, 2.25–26; Goldin, 115]). Cf. MRS 96 and 79 respectively.

<sup>7</sup> See: G.D. Cohen, ‘Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought’, A. Altman (ed.), *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Cambridge, 1967, pp. 19–48 (= *idem*, *Studies in the Variety of Rabbinic Cultures*, Philadelphia and New York, 1991, pp. 243–269). Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia, 1968, V, p. 272, n.19, argues that ‘The appellation of Edom for Rome is rarely found in tannaitic sources’. Similarly, Jacob Neusner has shown that ‘‘Edom’’ in the sense of Rome does not occur [in the Mishnah and in the Tosefta]. See *idem*, *Judaism in the Matrix of Christianity*, Philadelphia, 1986, pp. 73–87 (the quotation is at p. 76). According to Neusner, a shift from tannaitic to Amoraic sources (and therefore times) can be noticed; ‘Esau’ and ‘Edom’ begin to function as appellation to Rome only in the later Rabbinic works, not in the early, Tannaitic, sources. As Ginzberg himself noted, however, ‘the use of the names Edom, Seir, Esau, and similar ones, to describe Rome is very old, and was probably coined at the time of Herod’ (*ibid.*). Moreover, the identification of ‘Esau’ and ‘Edom’ with Rome is implicit in numerous passages as the ones we are analyzing here. Neusner’s comparison between the Amoraic Genesis Rabbah and the Tannaitic Mishnah (and Tosefta) is misleading because arbitrarily he excluded other Tannaitic sources from the discussion – that is: the Tannaitic Midrashim, which were compiled and edited at approximately the same time as the Mishnah and the Tosefta (cf. D. Boyarin, ‘On The Status of the Tannaitic Midrashim’, *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 112 [1992] pp. 455–465), and which are much closer in their literary character (i.e. midrash) to that of Genesis Rabbah than the Mishnah is.

<sup>8</sup> MRI, *Shirta*, 5 (Horovitz-Rabin, 134; Lauterbach, 2.42; Goldin, 150–151). Cf. MRS, 85. As noted by Lauterbach (*ibid* n.3), from the context in Ezek 36 it is clear that the foe mentioned there is indeed Esau.

<sup>9</sup> This idea is made explicit by various rabbinic sources of a later period. E.g., ‘As Egypt was afflicted by blood, so too Edom will be afflicted by blood’ (Psikta de Rav Kahana, 7:11 [ed. B. Mandelbaum, New York, 1962, 1.133]). Similarly we read in Midrash Tanchuma: ‘All the afflictions which the holy One, blessed be he, has brought upon the Egyptians He is destined to bring upon Edom... The Egyptians He afflicted with blood, so too will be with Edom’ (Midrash Tanhuma, Buber’s Recension, Bo, 6 [Vol. II, pp. 43–44]). A comparison between the fate of Rome and that of Egypt is made also by Exodus Rabbah, 15:17: ‘In Egypt He punished them... and concerning Edom too it is written, ‘‘I have trodden the winepress alone’’ (Isa. 63:3). And the Holy Spirit said: ‘‘Egypt will be desolate, and Edom will become a desolated wilderness’’ (Joel 4:19). Cf. I.J. Yuval, ‘‘Two Nations in Your Womb’’: *Perceptions of Jews and Christians*, Tel Aviv, 2000, p. 115, n. 25 [in Hebrew]. For other sources, where the final redemption is colored in a similar manner to the exodus from Egypt, see M. Schmelzer, ‘Miracles Juxtaposed: Creation, Exodus and Redemption in an Ancient *Piyyut*’, E. Fleischer et al. (eds.), *Me’ah She’arim: Studies in Medieval Jewish Spiritual Life in Memeory of Isadore Twersky*, Jerusalem, 2001, pp. 74–75 [in Hebrew].

<sup>10</sup> MRI, *Shirta*, 6 (Horovitz-Rabin, 134; Lauterbach, 2.42; Goldin 152).

<sup>11</sup> MRI, *ibid.* (Horovitz-Rabin, 135; Lauterbach, 2.42–43; Goldin, *ibid.*). The underlying assumption of the midrash’s claim is that God himself has no enemies. This is stated explicitly in the Tannaitic Midrash on Numbers, 10:35, the Sifre (pisqa 84): ‘‘And let them that hate thee’’ (Num 10:35) – but are there any enemies before Him who spoke and the world came to be?! [Surely not], but Scripture teaches that whoever hates Israel it is as if he hates Him who spoke and the world came to be. See H.S. Horovitz (ed.), *Siphre D’Be Rab, Fasciculus primus: Siphre ad Numeros adjecto Siphre Zutta*, Leipzig, 1917, p. 81. In fact, that midrash goes on to support its interpretation by quoting our very verse from Exodus: ‘Similarly you say: ‘‘And in the greatness of Thy majesty Thou overthrowest Thy adversaries (Ex 15:7)’’ – but are there adversaries before Him who spoke and the world came to be?! [Surely not], but Scripture teaches that who ever stands up against Israel it is as if he stands up against Him who spoke and the world came to be’ (*ibid.*). Moreover, that midrash supports this interpretation by quoting the same verses in Psalms 74:23, 83:3–4, and 139:21–22, as the passage in MRI does. This is probably not a coincidence, for both works represent the same school – that of Rabbi Ishmael. See: J.N. Epstein, *Introduction to Tannaitic*

*Literature*, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1957, pp. 545–624 [in Hebrew]. In other rabbinic sources the words ‘those who hate Thee, O Lord’, of Ps 139:21, were interpreted as referring to sectarians. See: Tosefta, *Shabbat*, 13:5 (ed. S. Lieberman, New York, 1955, pp. 58–59); Sifre to Deuteronomy, 331 (ed. L. Finkelstein, Berlin 1939, p. 381; R. Hammer [translator], *Sifre: A Tannaitic Commentary on the Book of Deuteronomy*, New Haven and London, 1986, p. 341).

<sup>12</sup> MRI, *ibid.* (Horovitz-Rabin, 135; Lauterbach, 2.43; Goldin, 153–154); Sifre, Numbers, *ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> See Lauterbach’s note, at 43, n. 1.

<sup>14</sup> In a later Midrash this idea is related specifically to Esau, that is: Rome: ‘For when the house of Esau devise evil things, they devise them not only against us but also against Thee’. See *Midrash on Psalms*, 140:2 (ed. S. Buber, reprint New York, 1947) 530; W.G. Braude [translator], *The Midrash on Psalms*, (New Haven and London, 1959, 2.349). The roots of such a claim are biblical. See H.G.L. Peels, *The Vengeance of God: The Meaning of the Root NQM and the function of the NQM-texts in the Context of Divine Revelation in the Old Testament* (Leiden, 1995) 145.

<sup>15</sup> Sifre to Deuteronomy, 325 (Finkelstein, 376; Hammer, 337).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. J. Goldin, ‘Not By Means of an Angel and Not By Means of a Messenger’, Jacob Neusner (ed.), *Religion in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden, 1968) 412–424.

<sup>17</sup> In this, the rabbinic midrash follows the biblical pattern. See Peels (above, n. 14), pp. 274–276.

<sup>18</sup> In some text-witnesses the saying is attributed to Rabbi El‘azar – that is: Rabbi El‘azar of Modi‘in (and such explicit reading is also attested by some of the text witnesses). See M.I. Kahana, *The Two Mekhilot on the Amalek Portion* (Jerusalem, 1999) 70–71; 192 [in Hebrew]. This textual ambiguity, however, is immaterial for our discussion, as both Rabbis flourished at approximately the same time, that is, in the second half of the first, and the first third of the second, centuries CE in Palestine.

<sup>19</sup> MRI, *Amalek*, 2 (Horovitz-Rabin, 186; Lauterbach, 2.158–159). Cf. Kahana, *The Two Mekhilot*, 239–243.

<sup>20</sup> See Ginzberg, *Legends* (above, n. 7), V, p. 272, n. 19; VI, p. 24, n. 141; p. 25, n. 147

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Kahana, *The Two Mekhilot*, p. 240.

<sup>22</sup> MRI, *Amalek*, 2 (Horovitz-Rabin, 186; Lauterbach, 2.160). Kahana (*The Two Mekhilot.*, pp. 56–57) has noted that in the majority of the text witnesses the reading is not ‘the Holy one, blessed be he’, as it appears in the vulgar printed editions, but ‘the king’. Ingeniously he interprets Rabbi Joshua’s statement as speaking of a mortal king, who is commanded to blot out the name of Amalek (cf. Sifre to Deuteronomy, 67 [Finkelstein, 132; Hammer, 121]; Tosefta, *Sanhedrin*, 4:21; Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 20b). This suggestion, however, ignores the eschatological makeup of the entire passage (an aspect to which Kahana was apparently aware – see *ibid.*, p. 57, n. 43), and, more importantly, it is difficult to deny the simple fact that the verse under discussion says explicitly ‘the Lord will have war with Amalek’, and this makes it almost a necessity to assume that God is being referred to here. It is only for this reason that Rabbi Joshua ben Levi could see a contradiction between the preceding verse and Deut 25:19: ‘Rabbi Joshua ben Levi, in the name of Rabbi Alexanderi [asked]: One verse says “You shall blot out the remembrance of Amalek” (Deut 25:19), and one verse says “I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek” (Ex 17:14); how can these two verses be reconciled?’ (Psikta de-Rav Kahana, 3:15 [Mandelbaum, 52] and parallels). ‘The King’ is a very common reference to God in Rabbinic literature, and the formulation in MRS, 126–127 supports this understanding: ‘When He will sit upon the throne of God, and there will be the war of God, at that time “the Lord will have war with Amalek” (Ex 18:16), these are the words of Rabbi Joshua.’ The subject of the verb ‘sit’ is absent altogether, and the sentence, therefore, cannot be understood but as referring to God. The difficulty that Kahana finds in interpreting the passage as speaking of the Heavenly King, since it implies that in the present God does not sit upon His throne and His reign does not prevail (*ibid.*, p. 56), misses the point; Rabbi Joshua indeed argues that as long as God does not eradicate Amalek His reign does not prevail. As Kahana (*ibid.*) noted, this is explicitly stated in the later, Amoraic, Midrash: ‘As long as the seed of Amalek exists in the world neither the Name is complete nor the Throne is complete’ (Psikta de-Rav Kahana, 3:16 [Mandelbaum, 1.53]). In the Midrash on Psalms, 97:1 (Buber, 422; Braude, 2.141) this idea is applied explicitly to Rome: “The Lord reigns let the earth rejoice” (Ps. 97:1) – [this is] to teach you that there is no rejoicing in the world, and neither the Name, nor the Throne, is complete, so long as the kingdom of Edom prevails.’ Cf. also Midrash Psalms, 9:10 (Buber, 86; Braude, 1.141–142); Psikta Rabbati, 12:21 (ed. R. Ulmer, *A Synoptic Edition of Psikta Rabbati Based upon All Extant Manuscripts and the Editio Princeps*, Volume 1 (Atlanta, 1997) 187; W.G. Braude [translator], *Pesikta Rabbati* (New Haven and London, 1968) 1.234); Midrash Tanchuma, *Ki Tetze*, 11; Midrash Tanchuma, Buber’s recension, *Ki Tetze*, 18. See also the midrash quoted by Kahana, *ibid.*, p. 241, n. 68, and Cf. G. Blidstein, ‘The Monarchic Imperative in Rabbinic Perspective’, *AJS Review* 7–8 (1982–1983), pp. 15–39.

<sup>23</sup> MRI, *Shirta*, 10 (Horovitz-Rabin, 151; Lauterbach, 2.80; Goldin, 242).

<sup>24</sup> Goldin, *ibid.*, took the citation of v. 18 as the concluding remark of the previous section in the Mekhilta. His reading and interpretation are consequently forced. Following Horovitz-Rabin and Lauterbach, I see this citation as a *lemma* for a new interpretation, which stands for itself. This, I think, is a much easier reading.

<sup>25</sup> Sifre to Deuteronomy, 333 (Finkelstein, 382–383; Hammer, 342–343).

<sup>26</sup> MRI, *Beshallah*, 1 (Horovitz-Rabin, 82; Lauterbach, 1.186).

<sup>27</sup> Sifre to Deuteronomy, *ibid.*. In the parallel in MRI, *ibid.*, there appears an important variant: the quotation of Joel 4:21 is divided into two parts by the insertion of the rhetorical question ‘when?’ before the concluding sentence ‘and the Lord dwelleth in Zion.’ This reverses the order of events, for while according to the plain sequence of the biblical verse ‘the Lord dwelleth in Zion’ comes after the avenger,



according to the midrashic reading God's avenger will happen only after He will dwell in Zion. See also next note.

<sup>28</sup> In the parallel midrash in MRI, *ibid.*, the midrash concludes with the remark that, 'When will "And the Lord dwelleth in Zion"? [When] "And I will avenge their blood that I have not avenged."' Thus, God's kingship can be established only after He avenges the blood of His people, and the latter is seen as prerequisite for the former. This reading, however, is attested only by the vulgar printed editions, and it is not supported by the rest of the text witnesses (see *variae lectiones* in Horovitz-Rabin's edition, *ibid.*), where this remark is entirely absent.

<sup>29</sup> That there were other Rabbinic views of the eschatological age and the final redemption is common knowledge and needs no special elaboration here. On this see: E.E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem, 1975, pp. 649–692.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Peels, *The Vengeance of God* (above, n. 14), 207. Similarly, 'The theme of the vengeance of God in the Old Testament... is entirely integrated in the Old Testament revelation of God and especially in the preaching of coming of God's kingdom' (*ibid.*, p. 284). It is to be noted that the 'vengeance of God' theme is not restricted to vengeance upon the nations; there is, in the same texts, vengeance upon Israel itself. See Peels, 102–132.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Peels, *ibid.*, p. 155

<sup>32</sup> On the centrality of the vengeance theme in Qumran, see: H. Kosmala, *Hebräer-Essener-Christen: Studien zur Vorgeschichte der frühchristlichen Verkündigung* (Studia Post Biblica, 1; Leiden, 1959) 396. Cf. Peels, *The Vengeance of God*, 306–307. On the vengeance theme in other Second Temple writings, see: Peels, *ibid.*, pp. 307–312. On this theme in the New Testament and its relation to the Old Testament material, see: W. Klassen, 'Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 28 (1966), pp. 305–312; T. Longman, 'The Divine Warrior: The New Testament Use of an Old Testament Motif', *Westminster Theological Journal* 44 (1982), pp. 290–307; S.H. Travis, *Christ and the Judgment of God: Divine Retribution in the New Testament* (Basingstoke, 1986).

<sup>33</sup> E.g.: Isa. 63:1–6 (together with 62:10 ff.); Ezek 35–36; Amos 9:11; Joel 4:19–21. See: Peels, *ibid.*, p. 149, n. 315.

<sup>34</sup> See: M. Hengel, *The Zealots: Investigations into the Jewish Freedom Movement in the Period from Herod I until 70 A.D.* (Edinburgh, 1989) 302–312.

<sup>35</sup> These anti-Roman military inclinations were nurtured by the 'ideology of freedom', which was widespread among Palestinian Jews in Antiquity. On this concept, see: D. Flusser, 'The Dead of Massada in the Eyes of their Contemporaries,' I. Gafni, A. Oppenheimer, and M. Stern (eds.), *Jews and Judaism in the Second Temple, Mishna and Talmud Period: Studies in Honor of Shmuel Safrai* (Jerusalem, 1993) 116–134 [in Hebrew].

<sup>36</sup> MRI, *Vayehi Beshallah*, 2 (Horovitz-Rabin, 96; Lauterbach, 1.215). There are other passages in MRI which reflect the same emphasis on various acts of devotion, such as *Beshallah*, 1 (Horovitz-Rabin, 90; Lauterbach, 1.203–204); *ibid.*, 2 (Horovitz-Rabin, 91–93; Lauterbach, 1.206–209); *ibid.*, 3 (Horovitz-Rabin, 100; Lauterbach, 1.223).

<sup>37</sup> Cf. M. Kister, 'Legends of the Destruction of the Second Temple in Avot de-Rabbi Nathan', *Tarbiz* 67 (1998) 525, n. 237.

<sup>38</sup> A story in a later, Amoraic, source expresses this ideology explicitly. See *Genesis Rabbah*, 64:29 (ed. J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Jerusalem, 1965, 710–712). Cf. G. Alon, *The Jews in Their Land in the Talmudic age, 70–640 C.E.* (Jerusalem, 1980) 2.436–441.

<sup>39</sup> In this context we should note that the rabbis have also created a possibility for Jews to live together with their pagan neighbors. See M. Halbertal, 'Coexisting with the Enemy: Jews and Pagans in the Mishnah', G.N. Stanton and G.G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Cambridge, 1998) 159–172.

<sup>40</sup> On other ideological revolutions which were introduced by the Rabbis by means of re-reading the biblical text, see M. Halbertal, *Interpretative Revolutions in the Making: Values as Interpretative Considerations in Midrashei Halakhah* (Jerusalem, 1996 [in Hebrew]).

<sup>41</sup> See J. Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade and the Idea of Crusade* (London, 1986) 50–57; J. Ward, 'The First Crusade as Disaster: Apocalypticism and the Genesis of the Crusading Movement', B. Albert, Y. Friedman, and S. Schwartzfuchs (eds.), *Medieval Studies in Honour of Avrom Saltman* (Bar-Ilan Studies in History, 4; Ramat-Gan, 1995) 253–292.

<sup>42</sup> See A. Grossman, 'The Roots of Qiddush ha-Shem in Early Ashkenaz', I.M. Gafni and A. Ravitzky (eds.), *Sanctity of Life and Martyrdom: Studies in Memory of Amir Yekutiel* (Jerusalem, 1992) 123, n. 46 [in Hebrew]; S. Immanuel, 'A Jewish-Christian Debate – France, 1100', *Zion* 63 (1998) 151, n. 36 [in Hebrew].

<sup>43</sup> Cf. R. Chazan, *European Jewry and the First Crusade*, (Berkeley-Los Angeles – London, 1987).

<sup>44</sup> For an English translation of these Hebrew texts see S. Eidelberg (editor and translator), *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades* (Madison, 1977).

<sup>45</sup> There is no dispute with regards to the fact that some of the Jews have actually done so, as evidence to this is found in non-Jewish sources as well. Nevertheless, scholars do not entirely agree as to the general facticity of the descriptions included in the 'Jewish Chronicles', and with regard to their literary nature. See: I.G. Marcus, 'History, Story and Collective Memory: Narrativity in Early Ashkenazic Culture,' *Prooftexts* 10 (1990) 365–388; R. Chazan, 'The Facticity of Medieval Narrative: A Case Study of the Hebrew First Crusade Narrative,' *AJS Review* 16 (1991) 31–56; J. Cohen, 'The "Persecutions of 1096" – From Martyrdom to Martyrology: The Sociocultural Context of the Hebrew Crusade Chronicles,' *Zion* 54 (1994) 196–208 [in Hebrew].

<sup>46</sup> This was in line with the Talmudic tradition. See Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 74a (and parallels): 'Rabbi Johanan said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Jehozadak: By a majority vote it was resolved... that in every law of the Torah, if one is commanded: "Transgress and suffer not death" one may transgress and not suffer death, excepting idolatry, incest and murder.'

- 47 M. Minty, 'Kiddush ha-Shem in German Christian Eyes in the Middle Ages,' *Zion* 54 (1994) 209–266 [in Hebrew].
- 48 D.W. Tiffany and P.G. Tiffany, *Power and Control: Escape from Violence*, (Lanham, New York, and Oxford, 2000) 3.
- 49 S. Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia,' *Standard Edition*, 14 (1915) 239–260.
- 50 Tiffany and Tiffany, *Power and Control*.
- 51 See Flusser, "The Dead of Massada," (above, n. 35) 134–135. Since Flusser has not furnished any relevant literature, my notes here can be seen as a supplement to his argument.
- 52 Relating the act of suicide and homicide of the Jews of Ashkenaz in 1096 to the similar action taken by the defenders of Massada was suggested already by M. Stern, 'Zealots,' *Encyclopedia Judaica Year Book 1973* (Jerusalem, 1973) 150–151, n.20; idem, 'The Zealots and the Sicarii: Branches of an Independence Movement,' *Cathedra* 1 (1976) 52; 54 [in Hebrew]; idem, 'The Suicide of Eleazar ben Jair and his Men in Massada, and the "Fourth Philosophy,"' *Zion* 47 (1982) 367–398 [in Hebrew]. See also Grossman, "The Roots of Qiddush-ha-Shem," (above, n. 42), pp. 116–119.
- 53 This is especially true in light of the fundamental distinction made in Jewish tradition between the willing to die for the sake of one's religion, and between committing suicide actively. The former is obligatory (in certain circumstances, see above, n. 46); the latter—let alone the taking of the lives of others—is strictly prohibited. See H. Soloveitchic, 'Religious Law and Change: The Medieval Ashkenazic Example,' *AJS Review* 12 (1987) 205–221; B. Gesundheit, 'Suicide—A Halakhic and Moral Analysis of *Masekhet Semahot*, chapter 2, laws 1–6,' *Tradition* 35 (2001) 34–51. Admittedly, one could find a few ancient rabbinic sources that imply a permit—perhaps even a praise—for suicide in order to avoid forced conversion. See Grossman, "The Roots of Qiddush-ha-Shem," 99–130. The killing of others, however, as a kind of protection from such a danger finds no support in the sources, in relation to which Ashkenazic Jews have shaped their lives. No where in the early Rabbinic tradition are we told that one is allowed to take the lives of others, even in the most extreme case of forced conversion.
- 54 On the violent aspect of the first crusade, See: B. McGinn, 'Violence and Spirituality: The Enigma of the First Crusade,' *Journal of Religion* 69 (1989), pp. 375–79; J. Riley-Smith, 'Christian Violence and the Crusades,' A. Sapir Abulafia (ed.), *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews: Medieval Roots, Modern Perspectives* (New York, 2002) 3–20.
- 55 Note, for example, that the motivation ascribed by the Jewish chronicles to the Christians' acts against them was the execution of vengeance. See Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb" (above, n. 9) 119. Yuval's rejection of these claims as a projection of the Jewish authors' concepts upon their enemies (ibid.), was refuted by Jeremy Cohen, who noted that the Latin sources support the Jewish claim. See Cohen, "The Persecutions of 1096" (above, n. 45) 172–173. As was shown by Chazan, the vengeance theme was central in the concept of the crusade. See: Chazan, *European Jewry* (above, n. 43) 75–80. See also Riley-Smith, *The First Crusade* (above, n. 41) 54–57.
- 56 D. Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate in the High Middle Ages: A Critical Edition of the Nizzahon Vetus* (Northvale and London, 1996) 227.
- 57 Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb" (above, n. 9) 109–124. Cf. D. Beger, 'On the Image and Destiny of Gentiles in Ashkenazic Polemical Literature,' in Y. Asis et al. (eds.), *Facing the Cross: The Persecutions of 1096 in History and Historiography* (Jerusalem, 2000) 74–91 [in Hebrew].
- 58 Yalqut Shim'oni, Psalms, 869. Since the midrash is attributed to 'our Rabbis,' without a specific designation, it is difficult to know its precise date.
- 59 For the expression 'two acts of vengeance,' with regards to Ps. 94:1, Cf. also Babylonian Talmud, *Berachot*, 33a. In the parallel in Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin*, 92a, however, the expression is 'two manifestations.' Cf. Sifre to Deuteronomy, 343 (Finkelstein, 398; Hammer, 354).
- 60 Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb," 118.
- 61 Pace E. Fleischer, 'Christian-Jewish Relations in the Middle Ages Distorted,' *Zion* 59 (1994) 280, n. 40, who apparently assumed that the poet has referred here to a concrete event.
- 62 The dependence of these Ashkenazic sources on the early Rabbinic tradition is also evidenced in the co-existence of an emphasis on the sanctity of human life (even that of a non-Jew) in the writings of the same authors, as is the case with the early Rabbinic corpus. Thus, in the same *Nizzahon Vetus*, in which we find an extreme exposition of the vengeance theme (above, n. 56), one also finds the claim that the Jewish tradition highly evaluates the sanctity of life, even that of a non-Jew: 'The heretics (i.e. the Christians) anger us by charging that we murder their children and consume the blood. Answer by telling him that no nation was as thoroughly warned against murder as we, and this warning includes the murder of Gentiles, for in connection with "Do not covet" (Gen 20:17) it says "your neighbor," but in connection with "Do not murder," "Do not commit adultery" and "Do not steal" (Ex 20:13–15), it does not say "your neighbor." This shows that "Do not murder" refers to any man; thus, we were warned against murdering Gentiles as well. What is the reason for this? "For in the image of God did He make man" (Gen 9:6). And it says, "Whoever sheds a man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed" (ibid.). This indicates that all men are included.' See Berger, *The Jewish-Christian Debate* (above, n. 56), p. 229. Similarly, the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin*, 4:5, states that 'whoever destroys [the life of] a single soul is deemed by Scripture as if he had destroyed a whole world, and whoever saves [the life of] a single soul is deemed by Scripture as if he had saved a whole world.' And according to the Tosefta, *Yebamot*, 8:7 (ed. Saul Lieberman, New York, 1967) 26, 'Who-so-ever sheds blood lo he is deemed as if he abolished the Image [of God]'. And according to MRI, *Bahodesh*, 8 (Horovitz-Rabin, 233; Lauterbach, 2.262), 'How were the Ten Commandments arranged? Five on the

one tablet and five on the other. On the one tablet was written: "I am the Lord thy God". And opposite it on the other tablet was written: "Thou shalt not murder". This tells that if one sheds blood it is accounted to him as though he diminished the divine image'. All these sources are not restricted to the life of a Jew. Cf. M. Smith, 'On the Shape of God and the Humanity of Gentiles', in J. Neusner (ed.), *Religion in Antiquity: Essays in Memory of Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough* (Leiden, 1968) 315–326; E.E. Urbach, "'Kol ha-Meqayyem Nefesh Ahat...": Development of the Version, Vicissitudes of Censorship, and Business Manipulations of Printers', *Tarbiz* 40 (1971) 268–284 [in Hebrew]; idem, *Studies in Judaica* (Jerusalem, 1998) 2.521–522 [in Hebrew].

<sup>63</sup> This view too goes back to Rabbinic literature, and perhaps it is even the predominant one there. See above, n. 29. Indeed, the biblical prophetic texts themselves include at least two views of the fate of the nations in the eschaton: destruction and "conversion", which are canonically juxtaposed.

<sup>64</sup> Yuval correctly notes, that the centrality of the vengeance theme in Ashkenazic sources cannot be explained only as a reaction to the events of 1096, as it appears in these sources already prior to the end of the eleventh century. See Yuval, "Two Nations in Your Womb," 118. On the abhorrence for Christianity among Ashkenazic Jews during the eleventh century as a contributing factor to the phenomenon of *Qiddush ha-Shem* in 1096, see also A. Grossman, 'The Cultural and Social Background of Jewish Martyrdom in 1096,' *Facing the Cross* (above, n.57), pp. 55–73 [in Hebrew].

<sup>65</sup> This is true with regards to the Christian tradition as well. Thus, it has been frequently noted that the book of Revelation has inspired the Christian tradition in a manner that contributes to the creation of a violent mind set. See, for example, A. Yarbro Collins, 'Persecution and Vengeance in the Book of Revelation', in D. Hellholm (ed.), *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East* (Tübingen, 1983) 729–749.

<sup>66</sup> A. Sapir Abulafia, 'Introduction,' *Religious Violence between Christians and Jews* (above, n. 54), p. XI.

<sup>67</sup> See Chazan, *European Jewry* (above, n.43), p. 157.

<sup>68</sup> Sefer Hasidim, § 1365 (ed. J. Wistinetzki, *Das Buch der Frommen* (Frankfurt, 1924) 334.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Chazan, *European Jewry* (above, n. 43); Grossman, "The Roots of Qiddush-ha-Shem" (above, n. 42), 119–127.

<sup>70</sup> I.G. Marcus, 'From Politics to Martyrdom: Shifting Paradigms in the Hebrew Narratives of the 1096 Crusading Riots,' *Prooftexts* 2 (1982) 40–52.

<sup>71</sup> See Cohen, "The Persecutions of 1096," (above, n. 45), *ibid.*; idem, 'The Hebrew Crusade Chronicles in Their Christian Cultural Context,' A. Haverkamp (ed.), *Juden und Christen zur Zeit der Kreuzzuge* (Sigmaringen, 1999) 17–34. Further discussions can be found in Cohen's forthcoming book, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade*. For a different view, see I.J. Yuval, 'The Language and Symbols of the Hebrew Chronicles of the Crusades,' *Facing the Cross* (above, n. 57), pp. 101–117 [in Hebrew].

<sup>72</sup> See P. Fonagy and M. Target, 'Towards Understanding Violence: The Use of the Body and the Role of the Father,' R. Jozef Prelberg (ed.), *Psychoanalytic Understanding of Violence and Suicide* (New Library of Psychoanalysis, 33; London and New York, 1999) 63. Needless to say, my use of the psychoanalytical insight is only as a model for thought, and bears no direct claim with regards to the people who actually have killed themselves and their relatives during the events under discussion. For sociological explanations see E. Weiner and A. Weiner, *The Martyr's Conviction: A Sociological Analysis*, (Atlanta, 1990).

<sup>73</sup> In this I follow I.G. Marcus, 'Qiddush ha-Shem in Ashkenaz and the Story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz,' *Sanctity of Life and Martyrdom* (above, n. 42), pp. 131–147 [in Hebrew], and the forthcoming English version: 'A Pious Community and Doubt: Jewish Martyrdom Among Northern European Jewry and the Story of Rabbi Amnon of Mainz,' Z. Ginor (ed.), *Mikra le'Avraham: Avraham Holtz Festschrift* (New York, 2003) 21–46.