

Looking East From Mt. Scopus

by Steven Sher (October 2014)

From this overlook, we can see beyond Maale Adumim

to the Dead Sea and as far as Amman.

Between us and an Arab village, forms are moving

on the nearest hillside, long contested,

going shrub to shrub in search of sustenance

from land that seems to mock their hunger.

Later we come upon this small flock

with its young herders, the oldest not yet a teen

carrying a black goat on his shoulders.

Two younger boys encourage the flock to keep pace

as the trail narrows and they approach paved road.

Here the older boy beats each goat with his stick

till it leaps the metal rail. When he puts the black one down,

he beats it too and it doesn't make a sound.

I imagine his father beating him like this

and the boy never crying out, never revealing his pain

though it carves out his future in the stone that's his heart.

Now the flock gathers at the main road.

The head boy beats the goats again to start across

once the cars and trucks have stopped.

The younger boys shout and toss stones
to keep the flock on track—no stragglers here—
but the black goat collapses in the road.
The boy beats it, but it doesn't stand.
He still is beating it when the flock reaches
the other side of the highway. Someone hits his horn
to move things along. The boy picks it up
and quickly carries the goat across on his back,
then drops it on the ground. The other goats
are heading home, bounding up the hill,
the young herders behind them. The older boy,
knowing he cannot return without it, nudges
the black goat with his foot, gives it a swift kick,
but it doesn't budge. He shouts, a last resort,
knowing that such threats, missing a whack from his stick,
seldom work. When the goat still doesn't move,
he turns after the others, leaving it crumpled in the dirt
like a torn prayer rug someone's flung
from the back of a truck. Maybe the boy tells himself
that he will come back for it or maybe he won't bother,
thinking it will be gone by then—things have a way
of disappearing in these hills—and he won't

have to carry it ever again if luck is with him,

once he invents the incontestable lie.

Brooklyn native **Steven Sher** is the author of 14 books including, most recently, *The House of Washing Hands* (Pecan Grove Press, 2014) and *Grazing on Stars: Selected Poems* (Presa Press, 2012). He has taught at many universities/workshops for more than 35 years. He moved to Jerusalem in 2012. Find out more at stevensher.net.

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