

Narsai

Rethinking his Work and his World

Edited by

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and Robert A. Kitchen

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The Faculty of Discernment in Narsai

Craig E. Morrison

Narsai's biblical homilies on David and Saul (*Mēm̄rā* 74), the Prophet Jonah (*Mēm̄rā* 14), the Prodigal Son (*Mēm̄rā* 33), and the Bronze Serpent (*Mēm̄rā* 55) probe questions of human sin and wickedness, personal freedom, and the human faculty to choose between right and wrong. At the core of Narsai's investigation is the human ability to discern, *pārošutā* (ܩܘܫܘܬܐ). Narsai rereads particular biblical characters to illustrate how, due to a failure in their discernment, they turned to sin and then lived disordered lives. But through *pārošutā*, discernment, they were able to set their lives back on the right course, because, as Narsai writes, the person is a treasury of discernment.¹ In these *mēm̄rē*, particular biblical accounts become stories of discernment lost and regained.

Pārošutā in the Bible and Early Jewish and Christian Literature

Discernment is a central feature of the spiritual, mystical, and ascetical life across religious writings.² In their conversation about discernment, Syriac authors considered how and when the human person received this unique faculty. Did Eve have this faculty when she encountered the talking serpent? Could she have resisted the serpent's suggestion (Genesis 3) before she ate from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Could she discern the serpent's deceit? These questions are as old as the Bible itself. The seventeenth-century author Edward Cooke's *Bartas Junior* (1631) argued that Adam and Eve knew good and evil before the fall. But after eating the forbidden fruit, they acquired the knowledge of the *guilt* of evil by the *loss* of good.³ More recently, Bernard Levinson notes that when Eve responds to the serpent, "she has already begun to reflect

¹ *Mēm̄rā* 24 'On Lent IV' (ed. Mingana 1.195.13–14): ܩܘܫܘܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܘܬܐ ܕܥܡܪܘܬܐ.

² Lienhard rightly notes that the term discernment is "a biblical term and has a long and somewhat complex history" (J. Lienhard, "On 'Discernment of Spirits' in the Early Church," *TS* 41 [1980]: 505). See also B. McGinn, *The Presence of God: A History of Western Mysticism*, vol. 1. *The Foundations of Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 137 and W. Spohn, "The Reasoning Heart: An American Approach to Christian Discernment," *TS* 44 (1983): 30–52.

³ P. Almond, *Adam and Eve in Seventeenth-Century Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 194.

upon the conditions of her life, her relation to God, her relation to Adam, and her freedom of choice.⁴ Then he asks the question that lingers in the biblical text: “How could Adam properly understand the instruction in any meaningful way as a command if he had no knowledge, the very thing from which he is to abstain? Absent the forbidden fruit of knowledge, Adam could not distinguish between the instruction as a command requiring his obedience and the instruction as merely describing an inevitable law of nature.”⁵ These questions were on the minds of ancient Jewish writers as well. Targum Neofiti expands on Gn 3:5 so that the reader learns that the faculty of discernment comes from eating of the tree:

Masoretic Text 3:5

והייתם כאלהים ידעי טוב ורע:

You will become like gods, knowing good and evil

Targum Neofiti 3:5

והוון כמלאכין מן קדם ייי ידעין למפרשה בין טב לביש

You will become like angels before the Lord, knowing how to discern between good and evil.

The Targum adds the key word למפרשה, “to discern,” here and again in Gn 3:22 so that the reader of the Palestinian Targums learns that from Adam will come forth one nation endowed with discernment:⁶

Targum Neofiti Gn 3:22

ומנה תקום אומ[ה] חדא דידעה למפרשה בין טב לביש

... from him will arise one nation that will know how to discern between good and bad.

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Gn 3:22

ועתידין למיקום מיניה דידעין למפרשא בין טב לביש

... from him are destined to arise those who will know how to discern between good and bad.

These minor expansions in the Targum illustrate the importance of the question of the emergence of human discernment for early Jewish writers. The person not only “knows” good and bad but, the Targum insists, can also “discern” (מפרשא) between the two.

But if Adam and Eve acquired discernment only after eating from the tree, how could they have recognized the wily machinations of the serpent? How can

⁴ B. M. Levinson, *Right Chorale: Studies in Biblical Law and Interpretation* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 43.

⁵ Levinson, *Right Chorale*, 44.

⁶ Targum Onkelos does not add the word “discernment” in Gn 3:22: ואמר יי אלהים הא אדם “The Lord God said, ‘See, Adam has become unique in the world, knowing by himself good and bad.’”

lical narrator, Narsai casts no guilt on Bathsheba for David's crimes. One finds no anti-Jewish remarks, which supports Frishman's argument that Narsai's anti-Judaism is milder than that of Ephrem, Jacob of Serugh, and Chrysostom.¹³ It contains relatively few allusions to the New Testament, and there are very few typological allusions between David and Jesus (perhaps because Narsai focuses on David's crimes). This last aspect is surprising since I approached this homily with my own preconceived notion about Narsai, supported by Frishman's general observation, that in Narsai's reading of the Bible "the Old Testament is truly in service of the New."¹⁴ But in this *mēmṛā*, Narsai reads the David and Uriah story with little reference to the New Testament.

As the homily opens David is victorious in all that he does. But when the devil comes on stage, David is unable to think correctly; he fails to discern. Narsai probes deeply into the machinations of David's mind that result in Uriah's murder. He observes closely how the devil disturbed (ܕܘܒܘܕ) David's discernment. David's writing became so disordered that he began to write backwards, from *Taw* to *Aleph* instead of from *Aleph* to *Taw*. This metaphor of reversed writing would be a grave ill for a rational creature (ܡܥܠܡܐ) – the very reversal of the creation of the person. Narsai interrogates David for his self-deception:

Why did you hide your own crime from the One who knows all;
you did not remember what you yourself composed, "He scrutinizes the heart"?
Was it not you who said, "He is in all things – in the heights and in the depths"?
No one can hide¹⁵ the deed of his hands from the Maker.¹⁶

Finally, David acknowledges that God has scrutinized his heart:

He saw that the trickery that he had concocted in his thoughts was exposed.¹⁷

But Narsai reserves the term *pārošutā* until his homily on David and Saul comes to a climax, just after he retells the prophet Nathan's biblical parable to David. He expands on Nathan's demand that David pronounce a royal decision on the stolen ewe lamb – the phony legal case that Nathan has invented. Nathan demands that David employ his faculty of discernment:

ܕܘܒܘܕ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ ܕܡܥܠܡܐ

Judge justly, according to the investigation of your discernment.¹⁸

David's lack of self-knowledge and his failure to discern, which has resulted in his crimes, now reaches a critical point:

¹³ J. Frishman, "Narsai's Homily for the Palm Festival – Against the Jews: For the Palm Festival or against the Jews?," in *SymSyr* IV, 228.

¹⁴ Frishman, "Narsai's Homily for the Palm Festival," 182.

¹⁵ Reading ܕܡܥܠܡܐ from ms. Vat. Syr. 594. The Patriarchal Press Edition reads ܕܡܥܠܡܐ.

¹⁶ *Mēmṛā* 74 'On David and Saul', 383–386 (ed. Patriarchal Press 789.4–7).

¹⁷ *Mēmṛā* 74 'On David and Saul', 407 (ed. Patriarchal Press 790.4).

¹⁸ *Mēmṛā* 74 'On David and Saul', 351 (ed. Patriarchal Press 787.20).

ܕܥܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ
ܕܥܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ

He unknowingly brought the just judgment down upon himself:
“As the Lord lives the one who did this is guilty of death.”¹⁹

Later in the homily, Narsai argues that it was “iniquity” that blinded David from proper discernment:

ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ
ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ

Iniquity blinded me from discerning judgment;
I did not reflect as I walked a fraudulent path.²⁰

But once David has been forgiven for his crimes against Bathsheba and Uriah, his faculty of discernment returns:

ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ
ܗܘܢܐ ܗܘܢܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ ܕܥܕܐ

The creator realized that (David’s) inclination wanted to preach through him, so he gave him back the power to penetrate into future events.²¹

Discernment, which involves self-awareness, self-possession, and self-consciousness, is lost through a surrender to iniquity and is then reacquired when the protagonist enters into a trial, fails at that trial, confesses his sin, endures a period of suffering, and then reacquires his faculty of discernment.

The Prodigal Son (*Mēmṛā* 33)

The parable of the prodigal son is an obvious choice for Narsai to develop his theme of lost and reacquired *pārošūtā*, since *pārošūtā* is an essential theme in the parable itself. The turning point comes when the son “comes to himself” (Luke 15:17: εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθὼν; ܡܥܘܠ ܗܘܠ ܪܗܝܬ) and reacquires his faculty of discernment. Once that has happened, the biblical parable describes at length the impact that reacquired discernment has on the son. From a narratological perspective, the brief remark from the narrator, “he came to himself,” is a supplementary detail that reveals the central meaning of the parable. Thus, it comes as no surprise that of the one hundred times that Narsai employs the term *pārošūtā* in his homilies, six of them appear in the homily on the Prodigal Son.

Narsai dedicates some twenty-five lines to the meaning of the three Syriac words from the parable, “he came to himself” (ܡܥܘܠ ܗܘܠ ܪܗܝܬ), before he allows

¹⁹ *Mēmṛā* 74 ‘On David and Saul’, 359–360 (ed. Patriarchal Press 788.4–5).

²⁰ *Mēmṛā* 74 ‘On David and Saul’, 419–420 (ed. Patriarchal Press 790.16–17).

²¹ *Mēmṛā* 74 ‘On David and Saul’, 500–501 (ed. Patriarchal Press 794.2–3).

ܘܗܘ ܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ

The hateful one who hired him made his life equivalent to that of animals and bound the manner of his discernment to mute animals.²⁷

In both the David and Saul homily and the Prodigal Son homily, the term *pārošutā* appears at the turning point in Narsai's recasting of these stories. Like David, the prodigal son fails to discern, suffers the consequences, and then re-discovers his faculty of discernment and recognizes his folly.

Jonah (*Mēm̄rā* 14)

The prophet Jonah, who also loses and regains his faculty of discernment, was another obvious choice for Narsai to illustrate his anthropology. For the first 200 lines of this *mēm̄rā*, Narsai remains close to the biblical story.²⁸ But when the fish appears, Narsai introduces the contrast between the mute one, the fish, and Jonah who is endowed with speech:

ܘܗܘ ܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ

The fugitive fell into the watery snares and the waves bound him, while mute creatures were silently adjudicating his discernment.²⁹

Narsai employs sharp irony to explore lost and regained *pārošutā*: the mute (*ḥaršā*) fish judges the rational (*mlilā*) Jonah's discernment.

When Jonah accepts the divine commandment, his faculty of discernment returns:

ܘܗܘ ܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ
ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ

He (God) taught him the way of the nations though he did not want (to learn it).

He taught him that it was fitting for him to love the nations.

The Son of Abraham acquired the understanding of discernment, for he called to the nations in the nature of the house of Abraham.³⁰

Then, as the homily draws to a close, the Ninevites too, like the prodigal son, come to discern their sin:

²⁷ *Mēm̄rā* 33 'On the Prodigal Son', 57–58 (ed. Siman 25.9–10).

²⁸ *Mēm̄rā* 14 'On Jonah', 1–200 (ed. Mingana 1.134–140).

²⁹ *Mēm̄rā* 14 'On Jonah', 209–210 (ed. Mingana 1.140).

³⁰ *Mēm̄rā* 14 'On Jonah', 345–348 (ed. Mingana 1.144.18–20).

ܠܚܘܒܐ ܠܡܘܬܐ ܕܢܚܘܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܘܒܐ
ܘܠܡܘܬܐ ܕܢܚܘܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܘܒܐ

He (God) made them hate iniquity, though they were not willing.
He requited them with his mercy for the discernment of the soul's remorse.³¹

The Bronze Serpent (*Mēm̄rā* 55)

The Prodigal Son, when he lacks discernment, is likened to a mute animal, and Jonah learns discernment from a fish. Narsai develops this theme when he refashions the account of the Israelite complaint against God in Numbers 21:4–9 into a story about discernment.³² The serpents sent by God to torment the Israelites are undiscerning ones or mute ones, who are not endowed with speech. The mute creatures punish the persons who failed to discern God's design for the Israelites. Narsai imagines the serpent addressing the Israelites:

ܣܠܐ ܕܘܕܒ ܗܘܐ ܡܢ ܕܢܘܒܐ ܕܠܦܘܪܘܫܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ
ܘܗܘܐ ܕܠܦܘܪܘܫܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܕܘܒܐ

The power that created me hindered me from harming your discernment.
Because you did not discern him (God), he set me loose so that I might straighten out your ignorance.³³

Narsai repeatedly draws out the irony of the mute, undiscerning one, the bronze serpent, teaching the rational person discernment.

ܠܚܘܒܐ ܕܚܘܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܘܒܐ
ܘܠܚܘܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܘܒܐ ܕܠܐ ܚܘܒܐ

The mute ones exacted the satisfaction for the iniquity from those who are endowed with speech.

They silenced them from blaspheming against the creator.

The creator taught the undiscerning (serpents)

to exact the vengeance of his dishonor from the discerning ones.

The undiscerning ones were discerning intensely in order to discern carefully.

Perhaps those possessing language were not discerning as they should.³⁴

³¹ *Mēm̄rā* 14 'On Jonah', 401–402 (ed. Mingana 1.146.8–9).

³² *Mēm̄rā* 33 'On the Prodigal Son', 156–180 (ed. Siman 29–30).

³³ *Mēm̄rā* 55 'On the Bronze Serpent', 71–72 (ed. Frishman 105).

³⁴ *Mēm̄rā* 55 'On the Bronze Serpent', 79–84 (ed. Frishman 105).

The root *prš* appears seven times in these six lines. People are rational and able to discern because they are endowed with language. Narsai's anthropology echoes the Targumic interpretation of Gn 2:7.

Masoretic Text Gn 2:7

וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֹפֵשׁ חַיָּה:

He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being.

Targum Onkelos Gn 2:7

וּנְפַח בְּאַפּוּהֵי נְשַׁמְתָּא דַּחֵי וְהוּת בְּאָדָם לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא

He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and it became in the man a spirit capable of speech.³⁵

Onkelos, normally faithful to its Hebrew *Vorlage*, makes a small addition that explains what makes the human person distinct from the other beings that God has created: The person is endowed with speech. Narsai reflects this anthropology when he describes the creation of Adam:

וּנְפַח בְּאַפּוּהֵי נְשַׁמְתָּא דַּחֵי וְהוּת בְּאָדָם לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא

He breathed into him the spirit of life, he made him alive and endowed with speech.³⁶

The gift of speech reveals that the person is rational and capable of discernment. Narsai draws out the contrast between the person and the bronze serpent in a lengthy, ironic praise of this inanimate, lifeless object, incapable of discernment, that gives life to persons bitten by the serpents. He addresses the bronze serpent directly:

וְהוּת בְּאָדָם לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא
וְהוּת בְּאָדָם לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא

O undiscerning thing, through which great power was spoken, who counteracted the poison of the undiscerning serpents.³⁷

When persons fail to exercise their God-given faculty of discernment, inanimate objects become their teachers.

³⁵ Targum Neofiti Gn 2:7: אדם לנפש חיה ממללא "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living being capable of speech." Targum Pseudo-Jonathan Gn 2:7: הוּת נְשַׁמְתָּא דַּחֵי וְהוּת בְּאָדָם לְרוּחַ מְמַלְלָא "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life) and the breath in the body of Adam became a spirit capable of speech to brighten the eyes and give hearing to the ears."

³⁶ *Mēmṛā* 49 'On Creation IV', 10 (ed. Gignoux 192).

³⁷ *Mēmṛā* 55 'On the Bronze Serpent', 157–158 (ed. Frishman 108).

Discernment in Other Homilies

What Narsai's biblical homilies illustrate through story, the theological homilies teach explicitly. Because humanity gained the faculty of discernment from the tree of knowledge, in the final judgement, humanity will be judged by the glorified Christ on how they used this faculty:

ܕܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ
ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ

In his judgment he (Christ) scrutinizes (the person's) rational faculty of discernment and he brings into the open deeds, words and the wink of an eye.³⁸

Narsai's eschatology in these lines is concretely illustrated in the lives of David, Jonah, and the Prodigal Son. The person is saved by discernment:

ܕܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ
ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ

The person acquires the freedom of the soul through his likeness (to an angel). The person is able to sin but also can be justified as a discernor.³⁹

The ability to discern preserves the person from wickedness as Jonah, the Prodigal Son, and David illustrate for Narsai's audience.

Everyone Should Be a “Discerner”

The purpose of Narsai's argument is to sharpen his listeners' capacity to discern. At the beginning of the homily on David and Saul, Narsai calls his audience “discerners”:

ܕܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ
ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ

From things that are mute he (David) taught eloquence: “Gaze O discerning ones into the silent course and give praise!”⁴⁰

So it is the task of the discerning person to give voice to the silent movements of creation. Then, at the end of this homily, he invites his listeners to become “discerners”:

ܕܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ ܕܢܚܝܘܨܝܢ

Come O discerning ones! See the voyeur who fixed his gaze and became blind.⁴¹

³⁸ *Mēmṛā* 45 ‘Homily on the Ascension’, 215–216 (ed. McLeod 174).

³⁹ *Mēmṛā* 65 ‘On Creation VI’, 247–248 (ed. Gignoux 268).

⁴⁰ *Mēmṛā* 74 ‘On David and Saul’, 87–88 (ed. Patriarchal Press 776.20–21).

⁴¹ *Mēmṛā* 74 ‘On David and Saul’, 538 (ed. Patriarchal Press 795.14).

Also in the homily on Jonah, Narsai invites his audience to discern carefully the meaning of the Jonah story:

ܩܘܼܠܼ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ
ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ

Read and consider discerningly the spiritual books.

See, you will learn that the mysteries are fulfilled in the hopes of the peoples.⁴²

At the beginning of *Mēm̄rā* 17 ‘*For Any Saint’s Day*’, he addresses his audience as “discerners”:

ܩܘܼܠܼ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ
ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ

Hear, O discerning ones, that there is a world without corruption.

Reject this temporal world whose course comes to an end.⁴³

At the end of *Mēm̄rā* 36 ‘*On the Passion*’, again he calls his audience discerners:

ܩܘܼܠܼ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ ܕܡܢܢܼܐ

Come, my brothers, let us scrutinize, like discerners, truth from deceit.⁴⁴

In Narsai’s world, everyone is exhorted to become discerners.

Conclusion

This brief article cannot do justice to the depth of meaning that the word *pārošūtā* has for Narsai’s understanding of the person. My hope is that this study will alert readers to its importance when they encounter it in Narsai’s *mēm̄rē*. Human history reveals the impact of that legendary day when Adam and Eve ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, a transgression that, according to Narsai, set in motion humanity’s faculty of discernment. Narsai exploits various biblical stories as vehicles for understanding the role of human discernment. Through their *pārošūtā*, King David, the prodigal son, the prophet Jonah, and the ancient Israelites bitten by serpents came to know themselves and God better. Their failure to discern resulted in their own suffering and the suffering of others. But later they reacquired their ability to discern God’s divine design in human history and in their own lives. Narsai wants his audience to do the same. His listeners should employ their faculty of discernment that distinguishes them from all other created things because when people fail to discern, they act like mute animals or worse, like inanimate objects.

⁴² *Mēm̄rā* 14 ‘*On Jonah*’, 273–274 (ed. Patriarchal Press 142.12–13).

⁴³ *Mēm̄rā* 17 ‘*For Any Saint’s Day*’ (ms. Vat. Syr. 588, f. 61r.5).

⁴⁴ *Mēm̄rā* 36 ‘*On the Passion*’, 774 (ed. McLeod 132).

The writings of twentieth-century mystics, such as Hannah Arendt and Primo Levi,⁴⁵ remind us that *pāroṣuṭā* is a critical human capacity and when humanity fails to discern, millions of people suffer and die unjustly – modern day “Uriahs.” Arendt in her major opus, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* describes her pre-World-War-II German society of eighty million people “that had been shielded against reality and factuality by ... the same self-deception, lies, and stupidity that had now become ingrained in Eichmann’s mentality ... But the practice of self-deception had become so common, almost a moral prerequisite for survival.”⁴⁶ On a much smaller scale, David, Jonah, and the prodigal son practiced similar self-deception before recovering their *pāroṣuṭā*. Hannah Arendt’s insights translate into our own day the exhortation of the poet Narsai, who centuries ago challenged his audience to live discerning lives.

⁴⁵ Primo Levi, *Se questo è un uomo* (Turin: Giulio Einaudi editore S.p.A., 1958).

⁴⁶ H. Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 52.