**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**THE STRAINED BONDS OF DIVINE LOVE**

**THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

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**Shiur #05:**

**The Prophecies of Hoshea:**

**Chapter 2: Second Honeymoon**

**Part 1: Confrontation (2:1-15)**

In last week’s *shiur*, we concluded our study of Chapter 1, the marriage of Hoshea and Gomer and the birth of their children, each of whom is given a progressively explicit name of separation and punishment. The children, whose names are presented as being symbolic of the inevitable and irrevocable future of the kingdom of Shomeron and its inhabitants, seem destined to live out their lives as Yizre’el, Lo Ruchama and Lo Ammi.

Suffice it to say that our chapter provides the promise of redemption from that fate with some of the most beautiful imagery imaginable.

We will study this chapter in this and the next *shiur*.

Before beginning our study of the text, there is one question to raise, which we may ponder together until we conclude the chapter at the end of next week’s *shiur*.

We understood that Hoshea is commanded “in real time” to marry (and he fulfills the command but incompletely) and then, as each of his three children is born, he is commanded by God to give them the despicable names that symbolize God’s relationship with His people. Painful as this may be, we can easily follow the flow of events as laid out before us, in the narrative prophecy.

However, the next chapter, which we will begin to study forthwith, has an entirely different rhetorical setting. It shifts to “pure prophecy” and the voice is that of God. This oracle is rather long (in *Tanakh* terms) and is followed by a short narrative prophecy, in which God is again speaking to Hoshea, again commanding him regarding a women he must “take” — all of which we will see soon enough. What are we to make of these abrupt shifts in the rhetorical mood? Furthermore, at no point in the “purely prophetic” chapter does God tell Hoshea to deliver these words to the people, nor is the prophet even mentioned at all.

Let’s keep this literary challenge in mind as we study the chapter, and then we will address it and suggest a rationale behind the rhetorical strategy.

THE TEXT

(We will examine the text segment by segment.)

 **Segment 1: Salvation (vv. 1-3)**

*Vehaya mispar benei Yisrael ke-chol ha-yam asher lo yimad ve-lo yisafer*

Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered;

*Vehaya bi-mkom asher yei’amer lahem lo ammi atem*

And it shall come to pass that, instead of that which was said to them: “You are not My people,”

*Yei’amer lahem benei El chai*

It shall be said to them: “You are the children of the living God.”

*Venikbetzu benei Yehuda u-vnei Yisrael yachdav*

And the children of Judah and the children of Israel shall be gathered together,

*Vesamu lahem rosh echad ve’alu min ha-aretz*

And they shall appoint themselves one head, and shall go up out of the land;

*Ki gadol yom Yizre’el*

For great shall be the day of Yizre’el.

*Imru la-acheikhem Ammi*

Say to your brethren: Ammi;

*Ve-la’achoteikhem Ruchama.*

And to your sisters: Ruchama.

1. The promise with which this segment begins hails back to Avraham Avinu, in the oath given by God (via the angel) as the immediate response to the *Akeida*, the Binding of Yitzchak. Even though Avraham has already been promised seed as innumerable as the stars and “like the dust of the earth” (*Bereishit* 13:17), this promise somehow seems to outrank those, as it is the addition given at the culmination of Avraham’s career, so to speak. It seems that “as the sand of the sea” is a common biblical metaphor for a number that cannot be fathomed. It is used to describe the grain that Yosef collects in Egypt (ibid 41:49), the army of the northern Canaanite kingdoms that engage the invading Israelites in battle (*Yehoshua* 11:4) and the breadth of Shelomo’s understanding (*I Melakhim* 5:9). Most Rishonim read this beginning as promising, although ibn Ezra (in both his earlier and later commentaries) sees this as continuing the rebuke of the previous chapter and noting that the people, once exiled, will multiply but will thus have lots of children continuing in the sinful ways of their parents. The continuation of the verse seems to belie that approach, as it brings the names of rejection back into the fold. Ibn Ezra defends his approach by interpreting the last clause as reflecting the attitude of the people themselves: they will think of themselves as *benei El chai*.

1. The mainstream interpretive tradition[[1]](#footnote-1) maintains that “the land” from which they will come up **is their land of exile**, which fits the verb *ve’alu* — coming to Israel and away from exile (especially captivity) is consistently seen as an ascent.[[2]](#footnote-2) The gathering of the Judeans and Israelites together implies that not only will “*benei Yehuda”* also be exiled but that they will be held captive together with Israel. The prophecy does not come to realization in this manner, as Israel is conquered by the Assyrians and dispersed throughout their vast empire, whereas Judea is exiled by Babylonia (and many flee to Egypt) and remain a somewhat unified community there. He offers two explanations for the phrase “*gadol yom Yizre’el*”: either it means that the **impact** of the punishment will be great and that they will have suffered enough to be redeemed; or it means, citing his father’s interpretation, that they will have been “sown” among the nations (hence “Yizre’el”) for a long period and the time will have come to bring them home. Rav Eliezer of Beaugency seems to follow the second approach.
2. Saadia Gaon understands this verse as directed to the children of Yehuda – that at this point they should (re-)welcome their (formerly?) wayward brothers and sisters back. In other words, the *navi* is adjuring the members of Yehuda and Binyamin to embrace the northern tribes as fellows. I’d like to take this one step further. Perhaps the prophet is interjecting this as a necessary step towards a realization of the great promise of verse 1 – in order for the people to be worthy of redemption, there has to be an acknowledgement of unity among the tribes. The common destiny of the Jewish people perforce means that in order for **any** part of the nation to be redeemed, they **all** have to be worthy of that redemption.

 **Segment 2: Confrontation (vv. 4-7)**

*Rivu ve-immekhem rivu, ki hi lo ishti ve-anokhi lo ishah*

Plead with your mother, plead;

For she is not My wife, neither am I her husband;

*Ve-taser zenuneha mi-paneha ve-na’afufeha mi-bein shadeha*

And let her put away her harlotries from her face,

And her adulteries from between her breasts;

*Pen afshitena aruma vehitzagtiha ke-yom hivaldah*

Lest I strip her naked,

And set her as in the day that she was born,

*Vesamtiha kha-midbar veshatiha ke-eretz tziya vehamitiha ba-tzama*

And make her as a wilderness,

And set her like a dry land,

And slay her with thirst.

*Ve-et baneha lo aracheim*

*Ki venei zenunim heima*

And I will not have compassion upon her children;

For they are children of harlotry.

*Ki zaneta imam hovisha horatam*

For their mother has played the harlot,

She that conceived them has done shamefully;

*Ki amera eilekha acharei me’ahavai notenei lachmi umeimai, tzamri u-fishti, shamni ve-shikuyai*

For she said:

“I will go after my lovers,

That give me my bread and my water,

My wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”

1. As can be seen from our segmentation scheme, I am following Radak and ibn Kaspi, who see this as a distinct section.[[3]](#footnote-3) Once the people have realized their own interdependence, they are next to challenge their leaders who have led them astray, away from God, causing them to be called “non-children,” as it were. The horrific feeling of alienation from which they will be saved should give them impetus to take on those irresponsible chieftains who cause disruption in their relationship with God. Continuing with the model of the “harlot,” they are to demand of those responsible for the nation’s straying from God to rid themselves of the accoutrements of “harlotry,” i.e. of idol worship.

At the completion of this segment, we will address a glaring difficulty in the sequencing here. If this challenge is to be expressed after the return, by what rights are the people returning? If it is to be taken on while in exile, which heads are there with whom to engage? See our discussion after v. 7.

1. The threat here is that if the ship of state isn’t set on its correct course, God will directly punish the entire nation. The imagery of this punishment is evocative of Yechezkel’s description of the birth and young years of Israel, after which she turns to harlotry (Ch. 16). It is likely that Yechezkel borrows his poetics from here. Presenting her naked to the world should be understood as rendering her defenses impotent such that she is vulnerable to any invaders. The framing of the threat this way continues the imagery of the harlot and takes her to her inevitable end. The second half of the verse, however, seems to turn in a different direction, perhaps even more dire. A land stripped naked of its defenses is an open invitation for a conquering army; a land laid waste and dying of thirst (i.e. drought and hence no crops) is of no interest to foreigners, except for its strategic value. In other words, the two steps in this verse threaten a demotion of Israel from desirable and vulnerable to undesirable, where her vulnerability is no longer her greatest liability.
2. Following the direction that I suggested in the first chapter, his own children are **supposed to be**“children of harlotry,” so instead he is instructed to give them names which symbolize that. Nonetheless, the message remains. The nation, the followers of those sinful leaders, are rejected offspring and that sentence will be ultimately passed as part of the punishment of the vulnerability and then undesirability of the Land.

1. The prophet now takes us to the cause of all of this misery. The harlot is herself seduced into thinking that the seducer will provide her with all of her needs and her luxuries. This seducer is Baal — the worship of which (whom?) is the foundational motivation for much of Hoshea’s mission. The word “*ba’al*,” which is the common name for Canaanite gods, has the meaning of “master” as well as “husband,” and that triple entendre works well within the oratory here. Although the word we have used here, employed in many translations, is “harlot”, her status is more precisely that of an adulteress (*mena’efet*), who leaves her rightful husband to follow a paramour who promises her much (but delivers, of course, absolutely nothing)[[4]](#footnote-4).

BUT WHEN?

As noted above, there is a difficulty in the sequencing of these passages, as the first segment takes us to a return from exile, after the punishment which is nigh, and even after the southern tribes are also exiled; yet the sense of our second segment is pre-exilic and is intended to motivate the people to correct the ways of the kingdom before that exile comes to pass. Perhaps we should view the sequence, or the sense, of the first segment a bit differently. The opening lines promise a return to the promise, to the Land and to the embrace of God. That should be understood as a distant image which comes at the end of a long exile (see the explanation of Radak’s father above). In order to avoid the need for that “re-embracing,” the people should challenge their leaders **now —** and that is what this and the following segments are expressing; i.e. in order to make the promise of the first three verses unnecessary, the people must — and still can — effect change immediately.

 **Segment 3: Punishment (vv. 8-9)**

*Lakhein hineni sakh et darkeikh ba-sirim*

Therefore, behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns,

*Vegadarti et gedeirah u-ntivoteha lo timtza*

And I will make a wall against her,

That she shall not find her paths.

*Veridefa et me’ahaveha ve-lo tasig otam uvikshatam ve-lo timtza*

And she shall run after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them,

And she shall seek them, but shall not find them;

*Ve’amera eilekha ve-ashuva el ishi ha-rishon, ki tov li az mei-ata*

Then shall she say: “I will go and return to my first husband;

For then was it better with me than now.”

1. The opening *lakhein* justifies this as the opening of a new segment, but its reference point is obscure. “Therefore” — as a result of what? Following our discussion about the sequence, this seems to be a further description of what God will do to the people if they do not correct their ways. The poetic sense has shifted from the adulteress stripped bare to a wanderer in a maze. Rav Eliezer of Beaugency reads this beautifully: The paths that I had opened to you to enjoy the fruits of the Land will now be closed off. The image of “thorns” is used here in apposition to the robust fruit of the Land: this **could have been yours,** had you not whored after Baal. The unusual word used here for “thorns,” *sirim*, appears only four times in the canon and always in the plural. The sense, quite explicitly in *Yeshayahu* 34:13, is part of the description of a wasteland, where nothing grows but thorns and the like. The use of *sirim* adds to the sense of desolation and ruin here.
2. Who are her lovers here? Most Rishonim, in commenting on “my lovers” in verse 7, interpret it as Egypt and Assyria; although Radak and ibn Kaspi allow for it to also or alternatively refer to idolatry. If the former, the second clause here is easily understood — those nations will no longer respond to Israel, neither for aid, nor for trade. If the latter, it is also easily read — the cult priests they consult will not be able to help them and advise them. (See Radak here.) The hope is that here, the nation will, with one voice, realize the error of her priorities and dependences and will commit to (try to) make amends with her spurned husband and return to him (Him). Her utilitarian motivation (“For then was it better with me than now”) is disappointing and speaks to a subpar quality of return. Nonetheless, this is perhaps the best that can be hoped for if it has gotten this far. If the only way for her to realize who (Who) really benefits her and gives her all of her needs and provides all of her luxuries is her legitimate *ba’al* — i.e. the God of Israel — then it stands to reason that will be what motivates her to return.

 **Interlude: The Divine Confession (v. 10)**

*Ve-hi lo yade’a ki anokhi natati lah ha-dagan ve-hatirosh ve-hayitzhar*

For she did not know that it was I that gave her

The corn, and the wine, and the oil,

*Ve-khesef hirbeiti lah ve-zahav asu la-Ba’al*

And multiplied to her silver and gold,

Which they used for Baal.

1. This Divine interjection is presented as a reflective statement, not only lamenting the denseness of the people but, in a sense, God’s own role in enabling her straying. The rabbis interpret the last phrase as a Divine accommodation with Israel’s waywardness:

What is “and Di Zahav” (*Devarim* 1:1)?

The School of Rabbi Yannai said that Moshe argued the following before the Holy One, Blessed be He [to atone for Israel after the Sin of the Golden Calf]: Master of the Universe, because of the gold and silver that you lavished upon Israel until they said “Enough!” (*dai*) — that caused Israel to make the Golden Calf…

Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachmani said that Rabbi Yonatan said: From where [is it derived that] the Holy One, Blessed be He, ultimately conceded to Moshe?

As it is stated: “And multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal.” (BT *Berakhot* 32a)

 **Segment 4: Punishment (resumed) (vv. 11-15)**

*Lakhein ashuv velakachti degani be-ito ve-tiroshi be-moado*

Therefore will I take back My corn in the time thereof,

And My wine in the season thereof,

*Vehitzalti tzamri u-fishti le-khasot et ervatah*

And will snatch away My wool and My flax

Given to cover her nakedness.

*Ve-ata agaleh et navlutah le-einei me’ahaveha*

And now will I uncover her shame in the sight of her lovers,

*Ve-ish lo yatzilena mi-yadi*

And none shall deliver her out of My hand.

*Vehishbati kol mesosah*

I will also cause all her mirth to cease,

*Chagah chodeshah ve-shabbatah ve-khol moadah*

Her feasts, her new moons, and her sabbaths,

And all her appointed seasons.

*Vehashimoti gafnah u-teinatah asher amera etna heima li*

*Asher natenu li me’ahavai*

And I will lay waste her vines and her fig-trees,

Whereof she has said:

“These are my hire

That my lovers have given me;”

*Vesamtim le-ya’ar va’akhalatam chayat ha-sadeh*

And I will make them a forest,

And the beasts of the field shall eat them.

*Ufakadti aleha et-yemei ha-Be’alim asher taktir lahem*

And I will visit upon her the days of the Baalim,

Wherein she offered to them,

*Vata’ad nizmah ve-chelyatah vateilekh acharei me’ahaveha*

And decked herself with her earrings and her jewels,

And went after her lovers,

*Ve-oti shakhecha, ne’um Hashem*

And forgot Me, says the Lord.

1. This second *lakhein* signifies a resumption of the punishment after the brief interjection of v. 10. This reads against the Midrashic view cited above, and the great wealth with which God has enriched His people is not an excuse for their behavior but yet another example of their ingratitude and moral obtuseness. The punishment of God’s taking (rather than “giving,” see *Devarim* 11:14) the grain “in its time” (see *Devarim* ibid.) is an abrupt turnaround from the idealized loyalty-rain-plenty-tithes relationship that God originally intends for His people. The common exegetical approach regarding the last clause is that “given to cover her nakedness” is a powerful rebuke. She thought that those fine materials were to be used for self-glorification or to impress others (Egypt? Assyria?) but they had a more basic purpose. Now that God will take them away, her nakedness will be revealed, continuing the theme from the earlier segment. However, there is another way to read this last clause. God will take away all of those luxuries *from their luxurious use* **in order to** cover her nakedness. In other words, the formerly wealthy and powerful nation will find that those items that she regarded as signs of her prosperity will now be needed for bare survival.
2. This verse brings us back to the image expressed above in verse 5. We would assume that this is no mere reiteration, but some sort of intensification, that if after the challenges that ought to be presented to her she still doesn’t return, this punishment is worse. Indeed, what will be exposed “in the sight of her lovers” (and here we will read this as the foreign powers and not the Baalim) is not only her vulnerability but her *navlut* — her indecency, the social and moral rot that she has tried to cover up. That no one will save her may either mean “no one will **be able to** save her,” since it is God Himself who is punishing her. Alternatively, it may mean “no one will **have any interest** in saving her” — and this takes us back to the degradation from vulnerability to undesirability outlined above.
3. Since she will be bereft of any material goods, there will be no means with which to celebrate festive days and thus they will all be “cancelled,” from the perspective of their purpose as joyous and communal celebrations. There does seem to be a bit of redundancy here as *chagah* and *moadah* seem to be identical. Radak explains that *chagah* doesn’t refer to calendar festivals but personal or family celebrations for momentous occasion. *Moadah*, of course, means just that: the festivals that are part of the national calendar. None of this will exist, as they all depend on both material plenty as well as some sense of happiness and peace of mind, all of which will be gone. This “ceasing” of celebrations which are centered in the Temple speaks, subtly yet with a loud whisper, to God’s rejection of sacrificial celebrations undertaken when the celebrants come with hearts divided. Whether divided in their allegiance to God or in their attitudes and behavior towards each other, their offerings are spurned by God. Yeshayahu’s opening prophecy speaks volumes on this trope, but it seems to be the subtextual message here as well.
4. The devastation of the land is described yet again, in more specific and “real” terms, and the point of her believing that her lovers had given her these gifts is underscored as the root cause for this denuding of the crops. Both the climatic conditions as well as the wild animals of the field will act as God’s agents to clear-cut the land. In the extended metaphor, she sees these gifts as her *etnan* (payment for her harlotry), yet these can all be taken by her true Master.
5. This punishment segment concludes with a clarification as to the cause of the misery she will experience. It is her whoring after Baalism and Baal worship which, in the end, leads to the harshest accusation: “*Ve-oti shakhecha,”* “She has forgotten Me” — and this is where God signs His name as it were: “*ne’um Hashem*.” All of the rebuke until this point leads to this final damning statement. The kingdom of Shomeron, Israel, between their belief in the salvation offered by foreign powers and their desire to maintain the Baal worship of the denizens of the land, has forgotten God.

In next week’s *shiur*, we will examine the text of the rest of this prophecy, taking us to the end of the chapter. As promised, we will conclude that *shiur* with revisiting the question with which we began, and we will propose an explanation for the rhetorical logic behind the sequence of these first two chapters.

1. The exception here is ibn Ezra, who reads it as a term of exile, not return. The “head” in his reckoning is Sancheiriv. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See, inter alia, *Bereishit* 42:2, *Shemot* 1:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Note, however, the approach of Rav Yosef Kara and others who see these two verses as tied together. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *zona* literally means she who strays [↑](#footnote-ref-4)