**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**

**By Rav Yitzchak Etshalom**

***Shiur* #06:**

**The Prophecies of Hoshea:**

**Chapter 2: Second Honeymoon**

**Part 2: Consolation (2:16-25)**

In last week’s *shiur*, we began our study of the beautiful and challenging prophecy of Chapter 2. Before beginning our study, we addressed a structural-rhetorical question. We understand that Hoshea is commanded “in real time” to marry (and he fulfils the command but incompletely). 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 that is, 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 rather long (in *Tanakh* terms) oracle is then followed by a short narrative prophecy, where 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.

When we finish our study of the chapter, we will consider a resolution to this conundrum, at the end of this *shiur*. For now, we’ll study the final ten verses of this prophetic unit, taking us from the powerful rebuke we studied in the last *shiur* to soaring imagery of consolation and return.

THE TEXT

(As we did last week, we will examine the text segment by segment.)

**Segment 1: REVIVAL (vv. 16-17)**

*Lakhein hinei anokhi mefateha veholakhtiha ha-midbar*

*Vedibarti al libah*

Therefore, behold, I will allure her,

And bring her into the wilderness,

And speak tenderly to her.

*Venatati lah et kerameha mi-sham ve-et Emek Akhor le-fetach tikva*

*Ve’aneta shama ki-ymei ne’ureha u-khyom alotah mei-eretz Mitzrayim*

And I will give her vineyards to her from there,

And the Valley of Akhor for a door of hope;

And she shall respond there, as in the days of her youth,

And as on the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt.

1. Just as the punishment segment (vv. 8-9) begins with *lakhein*, implying a causal relationship, so does this new section. The causality is a bit difficult to discern, however. In the previous section, the rebuke organically concludes with the appropriate and just response: punishment. Subsequent to that punishment — or is that the sequence here? — it is a bit odd to find words of rapprochement, especially unilateral words from the wronged party, as it were. Perhaps if we reorient our understanding of that punishment section, we’ll be able to see the development here. Instead of seeing these threats as *faits accomplis*, we should read them as God’s “internal musings.” He is considering, so to speak, what **ought**, by rights, to be done with this wayward nation. In His overwhelming love, He “cannot” bring Himself to execute this irrevocable banishment. Instead, and here comes the *lakhein*, He is going to take **reparative** action. In other words, the conclusion of the Divine dialectic is an utter rejection of rejection. Faced with the reality of the eternal bond with this straying wife, He strategizes how to “win her heart” back. He is going to seduce her to the spot of their first romance, the place about which Yirmeyahu (2:2) waxes poetic over a century hence:

*Ko amar Hashem:*

*Zakharti lakh chesed ne’urayikh*

*Ahavat kelulotayikh*

*Lekhteikh acharai* ***ba-midbar…***

Thus says the Lord:

I remember the devotion of your youth

Your love as a bride,

Following Me in the wilderness…

In real-world terms, this doesn’t necessitate a move away from the land; the “Divine seduction” may mean drawing her interests away from the cosmopolitan life of Shomeron which has done much to corrupt the relationship. On the other hand, if we read the *lakhein* as a sequenced step which necessarily follows the devastation of the land, we might see it as putting the horrific attack outlined above in a gentler light. God isn’t going to destroy the land and strip it bare for punitive reasons, or even driven by a desire to rehabilitate. Rather, by destroying the material trappings of success which led the leaders to abandon God, it will give them an opportunity to start over. The wilderness need not be Sinai or Paran; it might just be the freshly formed wilderness in the formerly lush Valley of Yizre’el. At that point, He will be able to again “speak to her heart” and woo her back to the fiercely exclusive relationship they once enjoyed.

1. Notice how quickly all of that plenty is restored. Oddly, though, it is restored “*mi-sham*,” “from there”. This is an odd use of the locative. How can vineyards be restored **from** anywhere? Radak and Rav Eliezer of Beaugency maintain that, following the logic of the text, *sham* is the desert. Radak explains that “from there,” i.e. from the desert, God will grant her the success of her vineyards **in the land** to which she will return. In his reckoning, the desert is the exile which is the (interpreted) implication of the punishment above; the length and difficulty of the exile will purify the people such that the remnant will be worthy of reclaiming the land and enjoying the land’s revival. Rav Yeshaya of Trani has a similar take: “There I will promise her vineyards” — this obviates the entire exile imagery and speaks directly to an agricultural revival. Rav Eliezer, on the other hand, understands that the promise here is not as generous as all that. God will give her those vineyards **in the desert**, i.e. limited rejoicing and celebration; in his take, this is far from a complete restoration.

Rav Yosef Kara reads *mi-sham* as “from the land of Israel” but it is unclear if he understands that there, in the desert of dispersion, they will receive the plenty so that they may “sing like the day that they came up out of Egypt” or if they will return to the land to enjoy that plenty. Contra the commentators cited above, it seems that the former is Rav Yosef Kara’s approach: that the bounty of the Land of Israel will be granted to them, somehow, in the wilderness.

The “Valley of Akhor” is a generic name, first applied to a valley in the Jordan Plain, the spot where Akhan, who steals from the *cherem* of Yericho, is publicly executed (*Yehoshua* 7:25-26). We would be tempted to consider that toponym as specific and unique, were it not for another mention of it in *Yeshayahu* (65:10):

And the Sharon shall be a fold of flocks,

And Emek Akhor a place for herds to lie down in,

For My people that have sought Me.

This verse demonstrates that Emek Akhor, perhaps building on the original model in *Yehoshua*, is a nickname given to a place of desolation which is bereft of life due to the sinful behavior of the former residents or people associated with the place.

The “new name” of this place, which represents a turnaround from the sinful and defoliated past, is “Petach Tikva.” Although translations render it “door/ gateway of hope,” the commentators do not have a satisfactory explanation of the metaphor. The meaning may be taken from the world of agriculture. A *patiach* is a “furrow,” the top layer of plowing when readying a field for planting. This valley of wretchedness, empty and (currently) not arable, will become a place where the first furrow opening up the land will be a sign of hope.

The use of *tikva* does seem to point our attention to the story of Rachav, the harlot who protects the two anonymous spies who come to Yericho (*Yehoshua* 2) and discreetly lets them out of her house by lowering them via a *tikva* through the window; she then used that same crimson cord (*tikvat ha-shani*) to identify her house during the conquest. The allusion to Rachav is multi-layered. Not only is she a Canaanite who **rejects** pagan belief and embraces the faith of Israel, but she is also identified by the text as a *zona*. Here, the people of Israel have been tagged as *zona* by God by dint of their embracing the Canaanite religion. Their only “hope” lies in their taking a cue from this heroic harlot.

*Tikva* in *Tanakh* is not merely “hope,” but rather the sense of a glorious future, as in God’s promise to Rachel in that beautiful passage in *Yirmeyahu* 31: “*Yesh* ***tikva*** *le-achariteikh*,” “There is *tikva* at your end.” Again, let us go back to the first interaction of Israelites and Canaanites. Rachav lives in a city slated for destruction but she is spared and joins the Jewish people (see *Yehoshua* 6:25). Perhaps the reason for using the equivocal *petach* is to allude to both the “furrow of hope” and the regeneration of a robust agronomy, but also to the various doors that play a role in the Rachav story: the door of her house, the gates of the city and the opening through which she effects the escape of the two spies.

Let us note one final thing about this verse. The *eim ha-moshavot*, mother of agricultural settlements, in the Land of Israel, founded in 1888, is named Petach Tikva in the spirit of this verse.[[1]](#footnote-1) The founders likely understand the agricultural meaning of the phrase as well.

The word “*Ve’aneta”* here is another agricultural allusion, as we will see at the end of the chapter. The land “responds” to its various blessings (rain, proper seasons, no invaders, etc.) and then yields its produce. The lovingly returned bride’s response, evoking her enthusiastic embrace of God on the way out of Egypt, is made manifest by the land’s response to God’s blessings. The phrase here, “*ki-ymei ne’ureha,”* “as in the days of her youth,” is certainly picked up by Yirmeyahu in the passage cited above of “*chesed* ***ne’urayikh***.”

**Segment 2: REGRET (vv. 18-19)**

*Vehaya va-yom ha-hu ne’um Hashem tikre’i “Ishi”*

*Ve-lo tikre’i li od “Bali”*

And it shall be on that day, says the Lord,

That you shall call Me *Ishi*,

And shall call Me no more *Bali*.

*Vehasiroti et shemot ha-Be’alim mi-piha ve-lo yizakheru od bi-shmam*

For I will take away the names of the Baalim out of her mouth,

And they shall no more be mentioned by their name.

1. The literary marker of *“Vehaya va-yom ha-hu”* indicates the beginning of a new sub-theme, one which is anticipatory but not necessarily eschatological. In this case, it anticipates a new type of relationship between the people and God, one catalyzed by God’s actions, as presented above, but exemplified by the people’s evolved perspective as understood by the different term of endearment they use for their Master. The text implies that there is something different about calling God *Ishi* (My Man) rather than *Bali* (My Master). In reality, though, the terms are synonymous, especially in the context of marriage — real or metaphoric. In order to understand this and the next verse, a bit of the history of the 9-8th centuries BCE is necessary.

When the Israelites enter the land, the commonly worshipped deities throughout the western Levant are various forms of Baalim, including Ba’al Berit, Ba’al Chatzor, Ba’al Zevul (which the text, in its inimitable style of denigrating idolatry, coins Ba’al Zevuv — hence “Lord of the Flies”) and so on. Baal-worship is a constant threat to the Jewish people’s loyalty to God and there is a regular undercurrent of syncretistic God-and-Baal devotion for the first two hundred years or so of the monarchy.

That all changes, however, when Achav, probably for political reasons, marries Izevel (known in the English-speaking world as Jezebel), a Phoenician princess and herself a cult devotee (and perhaps officiant) of Ba’al Zevul (Zevuv).[[2]](#footnote-2) At this point, Baal-worship becomes state policy and worship of God an offense. Witness the hundred loyal prophets of God that Ovadyahu hides away from the eyes of Achav and Izevel and the death sentence that Izevel decrees on Eliyahu after he bests (and then slaughters) hundreds of her court Baal prophets.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Let us take a moment for an interesting historic-textual note.[[4]](#footnote-4) The name “*ba’al*” is a perfectly legitimate cognomen for God until this point, just like “*adon*” is until today. We find Shaul naming his son Eshba’al, and his grandson is named Meriv Ba’al. David himself names a location Ba’al Peratzim.[[5]](#footnote-5) By the time we get to Achav’s monarchy, however, with the formal and mandated introduction of Baal-worship, it becomes a distasteful name. Therefore, when the Book of *Shemuel* is redacted into its final recension (a number of generations after Shemuel’s death[[6]](#footnote-6)), the theophoric *ba’al* is bowdlerized to *boshet* (shame). Thus Meriv Baal becomes Mefivoshet; Eshba’al becomes Ish Boshet; and even, going back to the Book of *Shoftim*, Yeruba’al becomes Yerubeshet.[[7]](#footnote-7) (By the time *Divrei Ha-yamim* is composed, during the Persian Era, Baal-worship is a dim and unpleasant memory. Because it is no longer an issue, the original names are restored; see, for example, I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 8:34.)

We can now understand the insistence on **no longer calling God the Baal of Israel.**

1. This verse gives expression to what was explained above. God’s removing the names of the Baalim from the mouths of the Israelites means exactly that: an end to referring to any of these foreign and useless deities as “God.”

Having the “names of the gods on their mouths” is a reference point for theological loyalty, as seen in the prohibition in *Shemot* 23:13, “You shall not mention the names of other gods, they shall not be heard from your lips,” which stands in apposition to the command in *Devarim* 6:13: “You shall fear the Lord your God and you shall worship Him and you shall swear by His Name.”

**Segment 3: RECKONING (v. 20)**

*Vekharati lahem berit ba-yom ha-hu*

*Im chayat ha-sadeh ve-im of ha-shamayim*

*Ve-remes ha-adama*

*Ve-keshet ve-cherev u-milchama eshbor min ha-aretz*

*Vehishkavtim la-vetach*

And on that day will I make a covenant for them

With the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven,

And with the creeping things of the ground;

And I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the land,

And will make them to lie down safely.

1. This is a strange covenant that will be made *ba-yom ha-hu*, in other words, when the names of the Baalim are no longer on their lips. The gist of the new *berit* seems to be one of security. Instead of the land and its untamed inhabitants acting against the people — as in “the beasts of the field” who (back in verse 14) would be devouring the produce of the land, will now be supportive, if only by their withdrawal, of Israel’s peaceful and prosperous existence in the land. Not only will the animal kingdom withdraw to allow a renewed agricultural boon, but those foreign pillagers and enemies will no longer be a threat. Those selfsame bows which could not help Israel on the “day of Yizre’el” (above, 1:5) will now be destroyed and no longer a threat in the hands of enemies — and thus no longer needed in the hands of Israel.

As the Rishonim point out, the image of a harmonious existence with nature, and even in the wild clutches of nature, is a common trope in *Tanakh*, ranging from the idyllic prophecies of Yeshayahu (e.g. the lion and the lamb…) to Elifaz’s adjuring Iyov to “have a covenant with the rocks of the field, and the beasts of the field will be at peace with you” (5:23).

**Segment 4: RENEWAL (vv. 21-22)**

*Ve’eirastikh li le-olam,*

*Ve’eirastikh li be-tzedek u-vmishpat*

*U-vchesed u-vrachamim*

And I will betroth you to Me forever;

Yea, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness, and in justice,

And in lovingkindness, and in compassion.

*Ve’eirastikh li be-emuna veyada’at et Hashem*

And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness;

And you shall know the Lord.

1. These two elegant verses, using anaphora to stress the betrothal (anew) of God to His people, speaks to the essential elements of that relationship.

The first component is the commitment that this time, the loyalty will **never** sway. God commits to take His people forever, which implies, perforce, their commitment to persevering in loyalty and faithfulness to Him. The next four components of the commitment are made of two pairs. On the one hand, the connection is limned by “*tzedek u-mishpat*” (justice and righteousness) which define *derekh Hashem* (the way of the Lord) in *Bereishit* 18:19. Does this mean that the people and God have to act with *tzedek u-mishpat* towards each other? That is possible, but it is far more likely, that the people commit to acting **towards each other** with justice and righteousness.

This points to a well-documented failing of the people during this era, as made clear throughout most of the prophecy of Amos, Hoshea’s peer (though not a prominent motif in *Hoshea* itself.) On the other hand, the stakes here are raised: not only must the people (read: the judiciary, aristocracy and royal houses) ensure righteousness, but they must do so with compassion and a sense of loyalty (the likeliest meaning of *chesed* here). In other words, it isn’t sufficient to judge the widow, orphan and other disenfranchised members of society **fairly**, they must also be given an extra measure of compassion — not necessarily in the courts, but in the embracing and protective arms of society. The implication of this commitment is that if the people embrace their own with these two pillars of attitude or behavior, justice and compassion, then that will also define their relationship with God. More accurately, it will define the way that God relates to them, judging them fairly but also meting out compassion, driven by His loyalty towards them. Stepping back, we realize that that is what this entire second half of the chapter is about: God’s unwillingness to abandon the people, although strict justice calls for it, because *chesed ve-rachamim* overpower that decision.

1. The word *emuna*, which in current usage generally means “faith,” means “trustworthiness” in *Tanakh* (see, *inter alia,* *Shemot* 17:12). Is the final clause another condition or description of the commitment, or is it the consequence? Rav Yosef Kara and ibn Ezra seem to see it as part of the defining characteristic of the relationship. Just as earlier, “she did not know that I was the One who gave her the grain…” (above, verse 10), now the nation will acknowledge that God has been the source of all of their blessings. In other words, this is the culmination of a complete return to God. Radak, however, sees it as the **consequence** of faithfully complying with this new covenant.

The custom of reciting these two verses while wrapping the hand-tefillin straps around the fingers, which looks like affixing a ring, dates back to the 17th century in Poland and is credited to Rav Natan Nota Shapira (author of the Kabbalistic *Megaleh Amukot*) of Krakow.

**Segment 5: RESTORATION (vv. 23-25)**

*Ve-haya ba-yom ha-hu e’eneh ne’um Hashem*

*E’eneh et ha-shamayim*

*Ve-heim ya’anu et ha-aretz.*

And it shall be on that day, I will respond, says the Lord,

I will respond to the heavens,

And they shall respond to the earth;

*Ve-ha’aretz ta’aneh et ha-dagan ve-et ha-tirosh ve-et ha-yitzhar*

*Ve-heim ya’anu et Yizre’el*

And the earth shall respond to the grain, and the wine, and the oil;

And they shall respond to Yizre’el.

*Uzratiha li ba-aretz*

*Verichamti et Lo Ruchama*

*Ve’amarti le-Lo Ammi*

*Ammi ata*

*Ve-hu yomar Elohai.*

And I will sow her to Me in the land;

And I will have compassion upon Lo Ruchama;

And I will say to Lo Ammi:

You are My people;

And he shall say: You are my God.

1. This final segment speaks for itself. The opening, echoing the *“ba-yom ha-hu”* of verses 18 and 20, establishes a rhythmic progression from a reorientation of the relationship (verse 18), to a new covenant (verse 20) to this final stage. The notion of God as Prime Mover is clearly elucidated here. God sets things in motion but each pole of nature, instead of merely mechanistically acting, is described as responding empathetically and energetically. God will evoke a response from the heavens (rain) which, in turn will evoke a response from the earth (rich loam)…
2. …And the healthy earth will then generate a response in the three main products of the land: grain, grapes (wine) and olives (oil). All of these will then generate a response to Yizre’el, that beautiful valley where the desolation will be redeemed and the formerly green, turned brown, will revert to green again. (See *Tehillim* 107:33-35).
3. All of this bounty, real and material as it may be, signifies something deeper. God will plant His people in the land (see *Amos* 9:13-15) and, at this point, the despised and rejected people will fully comprehend the sense of absolute return and Divine embrace in which they are safely and compassionately held. Note that the son named with the simple toponym Yizre’el needs no direct redemption; the rejuvenation of that valley suffices; the daughter who is simply abandoned (unloved) can silently bask in her renewed acceptance; but the final child, who has been called Lo Ammi, must aver vocally and clearly, as if to solidify his return as Ammi, “You are my God (*Elohai*).”

BACK TO OUR QUESTION

At the beginning of last week’s *shiur*, we faced a question (reiterated at the beginning of this *shiur*) about the rhetorical flow from Chapter 1 to 2 and the seemingly abrupt shift from narrative prophecy to pure oratory.

I’d like to propose that the chapter divisions mislead us (as they so often do) and that we ought to see these first three chapters as a single unit, as I pointed out in the introductory *shiur*. This entire prophecy of threatened punishment, saved by overwhelming compassion and loyalty, is simply the continuation of God’s command to Hoshea to name his last child Lo Ammi. Here are the last few words of the previous chapter, gliding smoothly into the beginning of ours: “…for you are not My people, and I will not be your [God]; yet [it could still be that] the number of the Israelites will be as numerous…” and the awful names be reversed… **as long as you are willing to challenge the leaders…** but, in the end, the compassion overcomes the judgment and the new covenant will be formed and, challenging or not, the names of rejection will be redeemed.

We end on this hopeful note, only to learn that Hoshea has not completed his task and must return to the original command, with which Chapter 3 begins. We will leave that for next week.

1. On a personal note, our family tradition maintains that my great-great grandfather, Rav Yosef (“Reb Yoshe”) Rivlin was the one to name the settlement. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is likely the source of her name, I**zevel*.*** [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See *I Melakhim* 18 and 19:1-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I am indebted to my teacher, colleague and friend, Dr. Leeor Gottlieb, for this observation. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *II Shemuel* 5:20 (cf. I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 14:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See, for example, *I Shemuel* 9:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *II Shemuel* 11:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)