**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 #15:**

**The Prophecies of Hoshea:**

**Chapters 5-6: The Wayward People (Part 4)**

In last week’s *shiur*, we focused our attention on the first two verses of Chapter 6, the people’s anticipated prayer of return. We noted the ambiguity inherent in the opening word *lekhu* as well as the linguistic connection between the rebuke and threat of Chapter 5 and the new awareness that will motivate the return. In this shiur, we will complete our study of the second verse and then the study of Chapter 6 and, with that, finish our assessment of this prophecy.

THE TEXT

PART 1: THE PRAYER OF RETURN (continued)

1. *Yechayeinu miyomayim*

*Ba-yom ha-shelishi yekimeinu ve-nichyeh lefanav*

After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him.

In the previous *shiur*, we looked at the significance of the two days-third day continuum in Tanakh through the eyes of the midrash in *Bereishit Rabbah*, which is driven by the “third day” of the *Akeda* journey. We saw how the midrash’s homiletic point of departure was our verse, and concluded that the “third day,” as viewed in the midrash, is not a day of relief, but a day of resolution.

The *Rishonim* are divided as to the referents of the “two days” and the “third day” as well as to the meaning of *yechayeinu*.

Rashi reads *yechayeinu* as “will bring us back to life,” and consequently (perhaps) understands the “two days” as the destruction of both Mikdashim. In other words, He will bring us healing from two devastating blows. This entire prophecy is then distant, speaking about a Messianic age. It is hard to understand this as *peshat* – what interest would such meta-futuristic prognostications have for the currently threatened First Commonwealth citizens, who have never experienced or heard of the destruction of a Mikdash?

Ibn Ezra suggests that the two days-third day sequence is not to be taken literally as periods of 48 or 24 hours. He suggests that two days is “soon” and on the third day, when the pain of a wound is usually worst (he references the story of the people of Shekhem in *Bereishit* 34:25), God will heal us. Part of what drives ibn Ezra’s approach is his understanding of *yechayeinu* as “He will begin to revive us *during those two days* and then finally on the third day, we will be fully back to life.” R. Eliezer of Beaugency adopts ibn Ezra’s approach.

Radak approvingly cites ibn Ezra and then adds an alternative explanation not found in either extant versions of ibn Ezra’s commentary. He notes that the “two days” refer to the two exiles – one which the people hold in their collective memories (Egypt) and the other which is coming within the next two centuries (Bavel). He then conditions the confidence of “on the third day we will live before him,” i.e. forever on “as long as we no longer sin.” Rashi and Radak interpret the word *yechayeinu* as follows: The people would be suffering and at death’s door for two “days” and then their fortunes would turn around and they would be revived on the third “day.” The difference between them may lie in how they read the prefixal *mem* of *miyomayim*, as I discussed in the last shiur.

Before leaving this enigmatic verse behind, two more comments are in place. First, this verse was used, like numerous other prophecies about revival, by early Church fathers to point to the foundational stories of Christianity as being rooted in Tanakh[[1]](#footnote-1). This may have been behind Rashi’s motivation to interpret the verse as being prophetic about the as-yet-unrealized “third day.”

Second, the approach recommended both by Rashi and Radak sees this anticipated prayer as focusing on a one-time event in the future. Either after two exiles (one yet to come), per Radak, or after two destructions (neither of which had yet happened) per Rashi, God will save us and we will live before Him. If indeed we anticipate that the people will say these words, then what is the source of this notion, that after two periods of near-death they will be brought back to life?

I’d like to propose that even if these are words expressed by the prophet, the notion is not foreign to his audience. Instead of reading the passage as a description of a one-time event, we ought to understand it as a pattern of Divine interaction with His people. This is likely the import of the midrash that we analyzed in the last shiur. In our relationship with God, there is often a two-period (day, year, era, epoch) of difficulty, doubt, challenge etc. which is resolved when the third period (which may be much longer than the “two days” which preceded it; see ibn Ezra ad loc) arrives. Perhaps this was even a “mantra of hope” that the people knew, based on the Avraham story, the Standing at Sinai, and even the story of Yona[[2]](#footnote-2).

The final verse of the anticipated prayer and commitment begins with two confusing words – and doesn’t get much clearer:

1. *Vened’ah nird’fah lada’at et-Hashem keshachar nakhon motz’o*

*Ve-yavo khageshem lanu kemalkosh yoreh aretz*

Let us know, let us press on to know Hashem; his going forth is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

The opening word of the commitment – *vened’ah* – which seems to be a commitment to *try to learn* something, seems to be short-circuited by the redundancy of the third word *lada’at*. Ibn Ezra offers a solution. He assumes the prefixal *shin* before *nird’fah* and the verse then reads: “We know that we have to pursue the knowledge of God….” He explains that this “is the secret of all wisdom, and for this alone Man was created. But he will not be able to know God without mastering many disciplines, which are like a ladder with which to ascend to the highest level.”

He goes on to explain the metaphor of the dawning light. First a man perceives God’s creations and then, with growing awareness, he understands God’s ways and sees the truth. R. Eliezer of Beaugency takes a somewhat similar interpretive strategy, and Radak expands on this approach. R. Yosef Kara has a different take. He sees the dawn here as real, not metaphoric. It does not stand for an image of clarity in our understanding of God, rather as an example of one of God’s creations obediently and consistently following its Master’s command[[3]](#footnote-3). In other words, we ought to return to God, Who can heal us from our wounds like no other, and demonstrate fidelity to our Creator “as sure as the dawn goes forth.”

The second half of the verse uses a model of healing that is common enough in Tanakh. From the perspective of Eretz Yisrael, there is little that is more healing than rain. The one exegetical challenge in this phrase are the words *malkosh yoreh*. *Malkosh* is the later rain that comes in the spring, just before harvesting; *yoreh* is the rain that comes at the beginning of the season (typically November)[[4]](#footnote-4).

Ibn Ezra (again) suggests reading the words as if there are prefixes missing: *kemalkosh* ***ve****yoreh* ***ba****-aretz*, thus including the two types of rain mentioned in the famous blessing in *Devarim*. Radak adopts this approach as well.

Rashi and his school (R. Yosef Kara and R. Eliezer of Beaugency) read *yoreh* as if it were written *yarveh* (same consonants). This reading is reflected in the translation we used here: “as the spring rains *that water* the earth.”

PART 2: GOD’S INITIAL RESPONSE

1. *Mah e’seh-l’kha Ephraim mah e’seh-l’kha Yehuda*

*Vechasd’khem k’anan-boker ukh’tal mashkim holeikh*

What shall I do with you, O Ephraim? What shall I do with you, O Judah? Your love is like a morning cloud, like the dew that goes early away.

Note that, as we saw in the rebuke section (Chapter 5), Yehuda is included, albeit secondarily, in the prophet’s castigation. The translation of “love” here is questionable. The sense, however, is clear. The positive attributes that the people endeavor to demonstrate in order to gain Divine favor and forgiveness are ephemeral and their superficial nature is transparent.

Note how beautifully the prophet turns the people’s vocalized interest against them. The alleged desire of the people is to come close to God as sure as the rising dawn and to be healed by Him as the rains heal the parched earth. Yet their claims of loyalty (*chasd’khem*) are like morning clouds, which both cover up the coming light as well as promise rain that never comes, and these clouds quickly dissipate. Instead of healing rains which are real, enduring, and life-giving, their own actions are as superficial as morning dew which, once the rising sun shines in all its glory, evaporates into mist.

God’s essential frustration with His people is expressed in the next verse:

1. *Al-ken chatzavti ban’vi’im haragtim b’imrei-fi*

*Umishpatekha or yeitzei*

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets, I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and my judgment goes forth as the light.

Rashi points out that the opening *al-ken* should be understood as *al-asher*, and rendered “because” (unlike the translation above). He further makes the point that *every* instance of *al-ken* in Tanakh should be understood that way.

The word *chatzav* means “to quarry” or “to hew” and is unusual here. In order to decipher it, we must first clarify the broader meaning. Which prophets are the referent here and when and how were they killed?

Rashi understands that the prophets here are God’s messengers. God “hewed” into them His messages, but the people did not take heed and instead God killed them on account of His words – an enigmatic explanation in itself. He then interprets the end of the verse as a rhetorical question: How can My judgement come to light when you refuse to listen to my prophets?

R. Yosef Kara takes the same approach as Rashi to the first part of the verse. He shifts away from his teacher’s approach at the end of the verse and reads it as a declarative statement – “My judgments concerning you will come to light,” i.e. one way or the other, the true judgment will come to pass.

Ibn Ezra, however, sees the “prophets” here as false prophets who misled the people and were therefore killed by God.

The use of *haragtim* here is odd; we do not hear about any massacre or plague affecting the prophets (at least, not since the days of Jezebel, a good hundred years back or so). Radak, adopting Rashi’s approach to the identity of the prophets, solves this oddity and then shares (as he does often) his father’s interpretation which carries an alternate solution:

… since “your kindness is like morning clouds” I overworked the prophets (like quarrying into a mountain) day after day, getting them to start the day early by speaking to you to warn you to stay the true path and you didn’t listen. The intense overwork I put them through with My agency is *as if I killed them* [emphasis added] and I did all of this in order for “your judgment to come to the light,” in other words that your judgment should come out like the light – i.e. when it comes out, as he said “like the rising dawn.” My father explained, “I hewed the prophets, I killed them” – (meaning) they died in carrying out My agency, like Zachariah[[5]](#footnote-5) and Uriah[[6]](#footnote-6).

PART 3: WHAT GOD WANTS

1. *Ki chesed chafatzti ve-lo-zavach*

*Ve-da’at Elokim mei’olot*

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.

This familiar theme throughout the Nevi’im, has its most famous (and earliest) expression in Shmuel’s rebuke to Shaul at the “Amalek debacle”:

*Hacheifetz le-’Hashem be-olot uzevachim kishmoa’ bekol Hashem?*

*Hinei shmoa’ mizevach tov, lehakshiv mecheilev eilim*

And Shmuel said, "Has Hashem as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of Hashem? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken preferred over the fat of rams. (*Shmuel* I 15:22)

Shmuel’s words, however, only tell us half of the story. They express the insignificance of offerings brought outside the relationship of servitude to God and fidelity to His laws. However, it is expressed in a most generic manner.

Micha of Moreshet fills in the second half of our equation:

*Higid lekha adam ma tov uma Hashem doresh mimkha:*

*Ki im-‘asot mishpat ve-ahavat chessed ve-hatzne’a lechet im Elokekha.*

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what Hashem requires of you: but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (*Micha* 6:8)

Note that Micha’s words immediately follow a passage that puts offerings into their proper perspective – and negates their being an automatic spiritual boon for the donor:

With what shall I come before Hashem, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? Will Hashem be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? (*Micha* 6:6-7)

It is as if Hoshea, anticipating his younger peer (or, in any case, his later peer), joins the sentiments of Micha with those expressed by Shmuel to give us the full picture. God does not reject the offerings – but He expressly prefers acts of loyalty and kindness between the members of His people and the pursuit of the knowledge of God (see ibn Ezra’s comments at the beginning of this *shiur*).

As such, the people’s return, replete with the same types of offerings that they have been bringing to the Ba’al, and unaccompanied by acts of kindness towards each other and an inner motivation to “know God,” is rejected and becomes a failed attempt to gain Divine favor.

PART 4: WHAT GOD SEES

1. *Veheima k’adam avru verit*

*Sham bagdu vi*

But as Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.

The prophet takes the people back to the earliest human experience of commitment, temptation, and sin, and the violation of the covenant is put into the starkest terms – as rebellion against God. Keeping in mind that the terms of the proper relationship have been explicitly made dependent on the loyalty among His people, as it were, the next verse sharply contrasts the image of Yisrael as they ought to be (in Verse 6) with the harsh reality.

1. *Gil’ad kiryat poalei aven*

*Akuba midam*

Gilead is a city of evildoers, tracked with blood.

The rabbis famously explain the conundrum of having as many cities of refuge on the east bank, with a much smaller population, as there are on the west bank of the Jordan, by citing our verse:

Why were there three cities designated on the east bank of the Jordan, where two and a half tribes resided, and three cities designated in Eretz Yisrael, where more than nine tribes resided? Abaye said: “In Gilead, which is located on the east bank of the Jordan, murderers are common. Therefore, a greater number of cities of refuge per capita were required there, as it is written: ’Gilead is a city of those who work iniquity; it is covered [akuba] with blood’” (Hosea 6:8). What is the meaning of covered [akuba] with blood? “Rabbi Elazar says: It means that they would set an ambush [okevin] to kill people.” (BT *Makkot* 9b-10a)

The word *akuba*, as seen here, is understood as “ambushing,” as in the meaning that Esav gives to it in *Bereshit* 27:36.[[7]](#footnote-7) This is, more or less, the general consensus among the *Rishonim*.

The mention of the *kohanim* in our next verse is most distressing:

1. *Ukh’chakei ish gedudim chever Kohanim derekh yeratzchu-Shekhma*

*Ki zimah asu*

As robbers lie in wait for a man, so the priests are banded together; they murder on the way to Shekhem, yea, they commit villainy.

Radak alleviates the distress by identifying these “priests” as priests of the Ba’alist cult. R. Yosef Kara explains that just as Kohanim gather to collect their tithes, similarly these robbers (not Kohanim!) gather to ambush innocent people.

Interpreting “Shekhem” in our verse as a toponym is not a matter of consensus. A number of *Rishonim* read the word as meaning “a band” (see the commentaries at *Bereishit* 48:22).

The word *sha’aruriyah* is the next verse is a hapax legomenon, appearing only here:

1. *Beveit Yisrael ra’iti sha’aruriyah*

*Sham zenut l’Ephraim nitma Yisrael*

In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing;

Ephraim's harlotry is there, Israel is defiled.

The word appears in a modified form (*sha’arura*) thrice in Yirmiyahu[[8]](#footnote-8). The meaning seems to mean “disgusting/abominable thing.” Note that once again Ephraim is paired with Yisrael, and Yehuda is omitted from this awful description. The Divine disappointment has rapidly descended from improperly brought offerings to bands of murderers, and we return, full circle, to the theme of *zenut* with which the entire book opened.

Though Yehuda was omitted from the previous verse, here again, they are not granted a reprieve and are also placed on the accused’s stand:

1. *Gam Yehuda shat katzir lakh*

*Beshuvi shevut ‘ami*

For you also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed.

When I would restore the fortunes of my people.

The prophet anticipates a time when God would like to restore His people’s fortunes and bring them home. But Yehuda’s own sins will prevent a seamless or even pleasant return. Instead, their return will be met with a “harvest,” which may allude to the winnowing out of some of its leaders. Alternatively (per ibn Ezra and Radak), it may refer to Yehuda’s participation in Ba’alist devotions, representing a “foreign implant” (*neta’ zar*).

In the next *shiur*, we will begin our study of Chapters 7-8, which like Chapters 5-6, represent a single prophecy with a (poorly placed) chapter division in the middle.

1. See 1 Cor. 15:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is part of a larger study of “historic pronouncements,” which may be read as historic patterns. One example of this is the line in the first *Berakha* of *Tefilla* – “He remembers the loyalty/kindness of the patriarchs and brings a redeemer to their descendants….” Is this “redeemer” Moshe? Is it Mashiach? Those are the two classic answers, but it may mean that throughout history, God sends various people to redeem His nation, all “for His Name’s sake, with love.” See *Shoftim* 2:15. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Sifri *Devarim* par #306. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Sifri *Devarim* par. #42 and Rashi at *Devarim* 11:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *Divrei Ha-yamim* II 24:20-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See *Yirmiyahu* 26:20-23. This is a bit difficult, considering that the killing of this prophet takes place a good century after the time of Hoshea. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Esau said, "Is he not rightly named Yaakov? For he has supplanted me (*vaya’akveini)* these two times. He took away my birthright; and behold, now he has taken away my blessing." Then he said, "Have you not reserved a blessing for me?" [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. 5:30, 18:13, 23:14 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)