YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:**

**THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

**By Rav Yitzchak Etshalom**

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

In honor and appreciation of Rabbi Etshalom, dedicated by Asher Reimer

\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*\*

**Shiur #36: The Prophecies of Amos: "The Hearken Sequence"**

In the [previous *shiur*](https://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-35-prophecies-amos-hearken-sequence), we continued our study of the series of five "disciplinary actions" taken by God to correct the people — each of which ends with the epistrophe *“Ve-lo shavtem adai, ne’um Hashem,”* "(Still and all) you have not (yet) returned to Me, says the Lord." We focused on the second of these rebukes, giving special attention to the potentially weighty significance of the conjunctive *ve-gam*. In addition, we analyzed the image of a selective drought and what that may mean, even for those "selected" to receive the rains.

In this *shiur*, we will continue our study of the text of these passages and focus on the third rebuke. We will complete the series in the next *shiur*. In the subsequent *shiurim*, we will engage in more detailed analysis of them as a group, taking the panoramic view and issues of literary structure into account.

**REBUKE #3 – VERSE 9**

**AGRICULTURAL DISASTER**

THE TEXT

*Hikeiti etkhem ba-shidafon u-vayeirakon*

I have smitten you with blasting and mildew

*HIKEITI*

The opening *Hikeiti* (stress on the penultimate: *hi-KEI-ti*) is best translated in the pluperfect: "I had smitten you." (This is as opposed to the provided translation, from the 1917 JPS edition, which implies an "ongoing present" as if the plague is still in effect.) It is vital for this rebuke-sequence that all of these events have happened and have been completed. Reflecting back, the prophet points out that these "disciplinary measures" accomplished nothing.

This is as opposed to the familiar instances of *hikeiti* in the Torah, all three of which are stressed on the ultimate syllable (*hi-kei-TI*), which indicates the future tense. All of these are divine threats, against Egypt (*Shemot* 3:20, 12:12) and against Yisrael (*Vayikra* 26:24). Even Amos himself uses *hikeiti* in the future tense as a threat (above 3:7: “*VehikeiTI veit ha-choref…”*), as it is used in numerous books of *Tanakh*.

Besides our text, there are only two instances[[1]](#footnote-1) in which this word is imputed to God. Unsurprisingly, in both of these instances, it is declared with a sense of frustration, as if this "smiting" had a purpose to effect reflection, repentance and change, none of which has happened. One of them is in *Yirmeyahu* 2:30, “*La-shav hikeiti et beneikhem,”* "I smote your sons for naught.” The other, much closer to home, comes from the other end of the chronological spectrum of literary prophecy — from *Chaggai*. Speaking to the priests of the about-to-be-rebuilt Temple, he castigates them for their ignorance of the Law and for their degrading attitude towards the *sancta.* Chaggai points out that, up until this point:

*Hikeiti etkhem ba-shidafon u-vayeirakon u-vabarad et kol ma’asei yedeikhem, ve-ein etkhem eilai ne’um Hashem.*

I smote you with blight and with mildew and with hail in all the work of your hands, yet you did not turn to Me, says the Lord. (*Chaggai* 2:17)

The similarities with our verse are more than happenstance. Chaggai deliberately borrows Amos's wording, phrases that were likely known to the priests of Yerushalayim in 518 BCE. There were undoubtedly plagues against the impoverished agricultural infrastructure of Yehuda at the beginning of the Persian period, and Chaggai interprets these to be God's response to the people's being distanced from His Torah. Indeed, the addition of hail to the list of attacks indicates that he is speaking to a palpable experience that the people have undergone. Nonetheless, his borrowing Amos's phrasing may mean that he intends to equate the people's negligence of God to the outright sinfulness of the Shomeroni court and aristocracy, Amos's audience.

In any case, the use of *hikeiti* as a past perfect participle is rare in *Tanakh*, especially when used in God's voice.[[2]](#footnote-2)

*SHIDAFON* AND *YEIRAKON*

Blasting (*shidafon*) and mildew (*yeirakon)*, the two plagues mentioned here, are a familiar pairing in *Tanakh*. As a matter of fact, one never appears without the other anywhere in the canon.[[3]](#footnote-3) A proper translation of *shidafon* is likely "blight,” which is a browning of the plant, indicating that the tissue is dead and that the plant is dying. *Yeirakon*, although sounding as if it ought to be "green,” is a whitish growth on a plant which indicates that it is starved of nutrients and the blooming of the plant will be stunted. These conditions are not related, yet they are both serious setbacks for a farmer and represent very real crop disasters.

The first appearance of this pairing in *Tanakh* is in the "great rebuke" in *Devarim* (Chapter 28) when, among the first series of threatened attacks against the people should they choose to turn away from God, we find the following:

*Yakekha Hashem ba-shachefet u-vakadachat u-vadaleket u-vacharchur u-vacherev u-vashidafon u-vayeirakon…*

The Lord will smite you with consumption, and with fever, and with inflammation, and with fiery heat, and with drought, and with blight, and with mildew…

Besides the mention in our passage and its parallel in *Chaggai* (see above), *shidafon* and *yeirakon* are mentioned in Shelomo's prayer at the dedication of the *Temple* (*I Melakhim* 8:37; parallel in II *Divrei Ha-yamim* 6:28):

*Ra'av ki yihyeh ba-aretz, dever ki yihyeh, shidafon yeirakon, arbeh chasil ki yihyeh…*

If there be hunger in the Land; if there be a plague; blight, mildew; or if there be locust or caterpillar…

The intent is that, in any of these situations, the people will turn towards this House and direct their prayers to God to be saved.

What emerges is that "blight and mildew" are an idiomatic phrase for agricultural calamities which threaten to destroy the entire year's yield. A wholesale attack on the agronomy of a country naturally brings to mind the series of plagues with which God punished the Egyptians. Hence, the Deuteronomic rebuke which culminates with the Jewish people’s being sold back to Egypt as slaves (*Devarim* 28:68) begins its list of threats with a warning that evokes the plagues against that selfsame nation, whose destruction was the necessary preface to the Jewish people’s deliverance.

When Shelomo describes a range of calamities which befall nations from time to time, he naturally includes our pair of plant diseases. All of these are occasions for man to turn to God in prayer, as Shelomo states there.

The upshot of these passages is to remind people that when they experience these sort of troubles, they should be reminded of God's war against the Egyptians — and take to heart how far from their mission they have strayed if God is now tormenting them with the same tools with which He saved them![[4]](#footnote-4) This, if nothing else, should be sufficient to cause the people to reflect on their behavior and to return to God.

Hence, when Amos (and, in his footsteps, Chaggai) reminds the people that the plagues operated at God's directive and were aimed at bringing the people back, the onus of their obstinance becomes ever greater.

*Harbot ganoteikhem ve-kharmeikhem u-teineikhkem ve-zeiteikhem*

The multitude of your gardens and your vineyards and your fig-trees and your olive-trees

*HARBOT*

The infinitive form *harbot* (assumed to be equivalent to *le-harbot* or *lema’an harbot*; see below) is uncommon in *Tanakh,* appearing in six places, including ours. A brief perusal of these six instances reveals an interesting pattern. Every time that this infinitive is associated with human endeavor, it is presented in a degrading fashion, hinting to "overreach;" contradistinctively, when associated with divine action, it is always a blessing.

In *Devarim* 28:63, in that same long, dire rebuke which brings us the "blight and mildew,” Moshe states that God will delight in the Jewish people’s destruction:

*Vehaya ka-asher sas Hashem aleikhem le-heitiv etkhem u-leharbot etkhem…*

Just as the Lord rejoiced over you to benefit you and to increase you…

Here, God's original "delight" was in increasing the nation. This increase is, of course, the blessing of population.

The same usage appears in the Chronicler's version of David's census (*I Divrei Ha-yamim* 27:23). He notes that David does not count the people younger than age twenty because:

*Amar Hashem le-harbot et Yisrael ke-khokhevei ha-shamayim*

The Lord said that He would increase Yisrael like the stars of the heavens.

(Note that both of these, while presuming blessings, are presented in the context of accursed events. We will discuss this further below).

On the other hand, the author of *Mishlei* uses *harbot* twice, both with negative connotations:

*Oshek dal le-harbot lo…*

One who oppresses the poor [by withholding their due] to increase his own worth… (22:16)

*Akhol devash harbot lo tov…*

Eating too much honey is not good… (25:27)

Whatever the "honey" may be (see the commentators ad loc.), the association of *harbot* with *lo tov* is inescapable, and it sets the stage for our remaining instances of *harbot*.

Let us return to *Devarim*. The "mandate of the king" in *Devarim* 17 lists three excesses in which the king may not indulge: women, money (gold and silver) and horses. In regard to horses, the following reason is given:

*Ve-lo yashiv et ha-am Mitzrayma lema'an harbot sus*

That he should not return the people to Egypt in order to increase horses (*Devarim* 17:16)

The sense from these three instances is clear: the powerful man is trying to take too much for himself, at a terrible cost (the financial solvency of the other or the independence of the nation). Even the two instances in which *harbot* is used with a positive spin (both having to do with God's increasing the population of His people) are presented within a negative context. In the one case, God's glee at our demise is set off against His joy at increasing us. In the other, David's sinful census is contrasted with the young people whom he does not count, as God has promised to increase the nation. From all of this evidence, it seems that the *Tanakh* consistently uses (following *Devarim*) the word *harbot* to connote an accursed increase. As such, we will read Amos's deliberate use of this rare infinitive as a subtle (or not so subtle) dig at the Shomeroni elite and their ravenous appetite for wealth, built on the back of the oppressed members of their society, Amos's constant refrain.

One final note about *harbot*. As we will see below, in our discussion of *ganot* and *keramim*, the corrupt amassing of land and beautiful gardens finds its starkest expression in *Tanakh* in the story of Navot of Yizre'el (*I Melakhim* 20). The heart of Shomeron, both politically and geographically, will ever be remembered for this terrible story of monarchic abuse. The word *harbot* should be enough to wake the Shomeroni audience, living within a century of the calamitous reign of Achav and Izevel.

*GANOTEIKHEM VE-KHARMEIKHEM U-TEINEIKHKEM VE-ZEITEIKHEM*

The cantillation marks split these four terms into two pairs: *ganot* (gardens) with *keramim* (vineyards) and *te'einim* (figs) with *zeitim* (olives). The latter pair should almost surely be rendered "fig orchards" and "olive groves,” to match the gardens and vineyards of the first half of the clause.

There are several linguistic considerations to take into account as we examine this supposition. First of all, the name of the fruit is used to denote not just the tree that bears it, but even a field of such trees. Second, we must take into account how frequently gardens and vineyards are matched, and how often fig orchards are mentioned alongside olive groves. Third, how often (if at all) are these two sets matched as a foursome?

Before proceeding with this line of inquiry, we ought to recheck the premises. Are these four really two pairs? If we were to ignore the Masoretic parsing, we might read *ganoteikhem* as a generic word and vineyards, fig orchards and olive groves as the specific examples or instances of "gardens." Whether to view these four words as two pairs or one broad word with three specific subcategories depends, to a great extent, on how we interpret the word *gan*.

*GAN* IN *TANAKH*

*Gan* (and its alternative form, *gana)* appear a total of over 50 times in *Tanakh*; however, considering how ubiquitous farming and planting are in *Tanakh* narratives as well as legal codes, this seems to be a sparse representation. In addition, as a result of the mentions of *gan* in narrative, it also has a marked presence in poetic and prophetic literature.

BDB[[5]](#footnote-5) considers the root of *gan* to be *gimmel-nun-nun* (to protect)[[6]](#footnote-6) and reads it as "enclosure.” This fits well the several mentions of *gan ha-melekh* and *gan Uzza* in *Melakhim* (and one in *Nechemya* 3:15).

It should not be surprising to find that there are thirteen mentions of *gan* in the story of the first garden (*Bereishit* 2-3). This "garden" is, indeed, introduced as an "enclosure" — first God plants a *gan* to the east of Eden, then He places Adam there. Only afterwards does God make the trees grow, such that when He puts Adam there, it isn't yet a "garden,” but more of an "enclosure.” The final mention in that section, when Adam is exiled from the *gan*, strengthens this image, as he is "locked out" and there are *Keruvim* and a fiery sword guarding the entrance to the enclosed place.

The two other mentions of *gan* in Torah bear mention. When Lot chooses to go to Sedom (*Bereishit* 13:10), he casts his eyes eastward and sees the lush valley of the Yarden, *ke-gan Hashem*. The referent seems to be none other than *Gan Eden*, but if it is called that because it is an enclosure, then that would be its name later. In the final mention in Torah, in *Devarim* (11:10), the Land of Israel is contrasted with Egypt, where “you may irrigate with your feet *ke-gan ha-yarak.*" This verse seems to use *gan* as "garden" in the sense we use it today. However, a *gan ha-yarak* may simply mean "an enclosed place used for planting vegetables."

Much the same could be said for the book with the second-most mentions of *gan*: *Shir Ha-shirim*, which has eight mentions, along with *ginat egoz*, making nine. Although the backdrop of *Shir Ha-shirim* is undoubtedly pastoral, many of the mentions of *gan* denote an enclosed place, where the bride and groom hope to be united in seclusion (e.g. 5:1).

We would use the same strategy to translate further mentions of *gan* in Tanakh. Thus, the case could be made for *gan* as a generic word and thus as a "topic word" in our passage. This would, as mentioned, counter the parsing suggested by the Masoretic cantillation marks.

It is, however, Amos himself who introduces[[7]](#footnote-7) *gan* as a purely botanical word, in a semantic field (pun intended) with a vineyard.

In the coda of the book, Amos foresees a glorious day when:

*Uvanu arim neshamot veyashavu*

They will (re)build desolate cities

*Venate’u kheramim veshatu et yeinam*

They will plant vineyards and drink of their wine

*Ve'asu ganot ve'akhelu et perihem*

They will make gardens and eat of their fruit[[8]](#footnote-8)

Here, without question, the prophet is using *ganot* as another type of planting area, parallel to the vineyards: a place in which fruit trees are planted. This may all be occasioned by the first *gan* in *Tanakh*, which is remarkable for its beautiful fruit trees.

This analysis does give us some greater clarify as to the meaning and relationship between our four areas. A *gan* (or *gana*), unless specified as to its use (such as *ginat egoz*) does not necessarily have a botanic nature. However, this may be elucidated by a later word or phrase (such as Amos's "eat of their fruit").

As such, we might read our phrase as two pairs — properly falling in line with the parsing of the cantillation marks — *ganot* and *keramim*, with the second half detailing the meaning of *ganot*. To wit, what types of *ganot*? Enclosures in which fig- and olive-trees are grown and harvested.

One final question remains regarding these pairings. As we have seen, Amos himself pairs the *gan* with the vineyard, and this match is fairly consistent throughout *Tanakh*, from the blessing of each man sitting under his fig tree and under his vine (*I Melakhim* 5:5) to the curse of "there are no grapes on the vine and no figs on the fig-tree" (*Yirmeyahu* 8:13). The pairing of figs with olives, outside of the inclusion of both in the praise of the Land (*Devarim* 8:8), only appears in the context of Yotam's parable (*Shoftim* 9) where the olive-tree, then the fig-tree, then the grapevine are each asked by the trees to agree to be their king. It is possible that the aristocracy of Shomeron had olive groves and fig orchards, along with vineyards — and that this is the focus of Amos's diatribe. Alternatively, perhaps Amos intends to deliberately present an unaccustomed mix to demonstrate just how "off" things have become.

*Yokhal ha-gazam*

The locust has devoured

Lest we forget our verse – all of these things, the gardens of figs and olives, the vineyards, have all been devoured by locusts. *Gazam* is a species of locust, most well-known from Yoel's prophecy (1:4 and again at 2:25), and it again brings us back to an evocation of the plagues against Egypt with all that that message entails.

*Ve-lo shavtem adai, ne’um Hashem*

Yet you have not returned to Me, says the Lord.

As we have seen throughout, the point of all of these plagues is to inspire reflection and return to God, which has not been accomplished even at this third stage in the sequence.

In the next *shiur*, we will complete our study of the text of these five components of this "hearken" rebuke; then we will devote a *shiur* to examining the overall structure and message of this section.

1. A third may be *Yechezkel* 22:13. I have deliberately elided *Yirmeyahu* 33:5 as that seems to be, per Shadal, a parenthetic statement. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There is one instance in *Tanakh* where a human makes this statement about himself: Shimshon regarding his slaughtering the thousand Pelishtim (*Shoftim* 15:16) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The one exception isn't really an exception, as *Yirmeyahu* 30:6 describes tormented human faces. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Amos will build on this image in the next rebuke; see our next *shiur* (#37) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See, *inter alia*, *Yeshayahu* 31:5; this is the root of *hagana* and *magen.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Even though *Yeshayahu* 61:11 clearly refers to a planting garden, this belongs to *Deutero-Isaiah* and cannot properly said to pre-date Amos or, for that matter, Yirmeyahu. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Yirmeyahu, again building on Amos, uses this meaning for *gan* in his famous letter to the exiles in Chapter 29 and in his beautiful prophecy about the return to Zion in Chapter 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)