YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**THE HISTORY OF DIVINE SERVICE**

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the Refua Sheleima of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

and Marvin Rosenberg (Meir Chaim ben Tzipporah Miriam)

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In memory of six friends and family,   
strong pillars of the Montreal Jewish community,   
who have left us in the past 7 years.   
All were אוהבי עם ישראל, אוהבי ארץ ישראל, אוהבי תורת ישראל.

Joseph (Yosie) Deitcher

Avrum (Avy) Drazin

Rabbi Joseph Drazin

Leibel Frisch

Israel (Mutch) Yampolsky

Dr. Mark Wainberg

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**Lecture 367: The History of the Divine Service at Altars**

**(177) – The Prohibition of *Bamot* (153)**

After dealing in the previous *shiur* with the sins of Jerusalem, we will turn today to chapter 23 in the book of *Yechezkel* where he describes the abominations and harlotry of the two sisters, Yehuda and Israel – Shomeron Ohola and Jerusalem Oholiva:

And the word of the Lord came to me, saying: Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother; and they committed harlotries in Egypt; they committed harlotries in their youth; there were their bosoms pressed, and there their virgin breasts were bruised. And the names of them were Ohola the elder, and Oholiva her sister; and they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. And as for their names, Shomeron is Ohola, and Jerusalem Oholiva. And Ohola played the harlot when she was Mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians, warriors, clothed with blue, governors and rulers, handsome young men all of them, horsemen riding upon horses. And she bestowed her harlotries upon them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them; and on whomsoever she doted, with all their idols she defiled herself. Neither has she left her harlotries brought from Egypt; for in her youth they lay with her, and they bruised her virgin breasts; and they poured out their lust upon her. Wherefore I delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians, upon whom she doted. These uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters, and her they slew with the sword; and she became a byword among women, for judgments were executed upon her.

And her sister Oholiva saw this, yet was she more corrupt in her doting than she, and in her harlotries more than her sister in her harlotries. She doted upon the Assyrians, governors and rulers, warriors, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding upon horses, all of them handsome young men. And I saw that she was defiled; they both took one way. And she increased her harlotries…

Therefore, O Oholiva, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will raise up your lovers against you, from whom your soul is alienated, and I will bring them against you on every side: the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them, handsome young men, governors and rulers all of them, captains and councilors, all of them riding upon horses… And I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in fury; they shall take away your nose and your ears, and your residue shall fall by the sword; they shall take your sons and your daughters, and your residue shall be devoured by the fire. They shall also strip you of your clothes, and take away your fair jewels. Thus will I make your lewdness to cease from you, and your harlotry brought from the land of Egypt, so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them, nor remember Egypt any more. 

For thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will deliver you into the hand of them whom you hate, into the hand of them from whom your soul is alienated; and they shall deal with you in hatred, and shall take away all your labor, and shall leave you naked and bare; and the nakedness of your harlotries shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your harlotries. These things shall be done to you, for that you have gone astray after the nations, and because you are polluted with their idols. In the way of your sister have you walked; therefore will I give her cup into your hand. 

Thus says the Lord God: You shall drink of your sister's cup, which is deep and large; you shall be for a scorn and a derision; it is full to the uttermost. You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and appalment, with the cup of your sister Shomeron. You shall even drink it and drain it, and you shall crunch the sherds thereof, and shall tear your breasts; for I have spoken it, says the Lord God.

Therefore thus says the Lord God: Because you have forgotten Me, and cast Me behind your back, therefore bear you also your lewdness and your harlotries.

The Lord said moreover to me: Son of man, will you judge Ohola and Oholiva? then declare to them their abominations. For they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands, and with their idols have they committed adultery; and their sons, whom they bore to Me, they have also set apart to them to be devoured. Moreover this they have done to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned My sabbaths. For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into My sanctuary to profane it; and, lo, thus have they done in the midst of My house. And furthermore you have sent for men that come from far; to whom a messenger was sent, and, lo, they came; for whom you did wash thyself, paint your eyes, and deck yourself with ornaments; and sat upon a stately bed, with a table prepared before it, whereupon you did set My incense and My oil. And the voice of a multitude being at ease was therein; and for the sake of men, they were so many, brought drunken from the wilderness, they put bracelets upon their hands, and beautiful crowns upon their heads. Then said I of her that was worn out by adulteries: Still they commit harlotries with her, even her. For every one went in to her, as men go in to a harlot; so went they in to Ohola and to Oholivah, the lewd women. But righteous men, they shall judge them as adulteresses are judged, and as women that shed blood are judged; because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands.

For thus says the Lord God: An assembly shall be brought up against them, and they shall be made a horror and a spoil. And the assembly shall stone them with stones, and dispatch them with their swords; they shall slay their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire. Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness. And your lewdness shall be recompensed upon you, and you shall bear the sins of your idols; and you shall know that I am the Lord God. (*Yechezkel* 23)

**The Names Ohola and Oholiva**

On the face of it, in terms of the meaning of the names, Ohola means "Her tent" and Oholiva means "My tent with her." Rashi, with respect to Noach's drunkenness,[[1]](#footnote-1) says as follow: "The word 'his tent' is written *oholoh* [with a *heh* at the end instead of a *vav*] as an allusion to the ten tribes who were spoken of as Shomeron which was called Ohola, and were exiled because of indulgence in wine, as it is stated: 'that drink wine in bowls' (*Amos* 6:6)" (Rashi, *Bereishit* 9:21).

**Regarding the use of the term "*ohel*," tent, we find in *Tehilim* 78 as follows: "**Moreover He abhorred the tent of Yosef, and chose not the tribe of Efrayim; but chose the tribe of Yehuda, the mount Zion which He loved" (*Tehilim* 78:67-68). The tent of Yosef is the *Mishkan* in Shilo, whereas the Zion mount alludes to the Temple in Jerusalem. The verse relates to God's despising the *Mishkan* in Shilo with its destruction at the time of the battle at Even ha-Ezer (I *Shemuel* 4), and His despising the tribe of Efrayim, and in contrast, to His selection of Jerusalem and the tribe of Yehuda to replace the tribe of Efrayim. On the other hand, if the reference is to the kingdom of Shomeron, its cultic centers were in Dan and in Bet-El, along the borders of the kingdom, with the calves placed there by Yorovam ben Nevat (I *Melakhim* 12:29). In addition we must further examine whether the permanent site of the *Mikdash* in Jerusalem which was built as a permanent stone structure might be called here a tent. **Is it possible, despite the permanence of the structure, that the prophet, when describing the background to the destruction of the Temple, refers also to the Temple in Jerusalem as a temporary place - as a tent - even though physically it was built as a permanent structure? This question requires further examination.**

**We are dealing here with two women, daughters of the same mother who had already committed harlotries in Egypt. This harlotry probably refers to idolatry, as the prophet himself described it above:**

And I said to them: Cast you away every man the detestable things of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against Me, and would not hearken to Me; they did not every man cast away the detestable things of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt; then I said I would pour out My fury upon them, to spend My anger upon them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, among whom they were, in whose sight I made Myself known to them, so as to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt. So I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt, and brought them into the wilderness. **(*Yechezkel***20:7-10)

**Different Meanings of Harlotry**

**The prophet describes in detail these women's sexual prostitution. It is clear from the very reading of the names that we are dealing with the period of the divided kingdom. Instead of remaining loyal to the husband to whom she was betrothed, Ohola Shomeron chose to fornicate with the kingdom of Ashur. It is interesting to see that the various terms of prostitution are used in several different senses, even for idolatry.**

**The notion that stands behind this expression in the political context is that entering into a covenant with another nation is on the profound level a denial of commitment to the connection with God. One who turns to a foreign power for help essentially denies the covenant with God. There are many examples of political submission serving as an expression of spiritual submission to other gods.**

**It is possible that Scripture here refers to the actions of Menachem ben Gadi who reigned over the kingdom of Shomeron in parallel with the rule of Uziyahu in the kingdom of Yehuda and paid a levy to the king of Ashur:**

There came against the land Pul the king of Ashur; and Menachem gave Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to confirm the kingdom in his hand. And Menachem exacted the money of Israel, even of all the mighty men of wealth, of each man fifty shekels of silver, to give to the king of Ashur. So the king of Ashur turned back, and stayed not there in the land. **(II *Melakhim* 15:19-20)**

**The prophet describes the clothing and beauty of the powerful lovers. On the one hand, idolatry and political betrayal by way of turning to Ashur, but on the other hand, the harlotry with Egypt was never abandoned. It may be that the prophet here refers to the actions of the last king of Shomeron, Hoshea ben Ela, who sent emissaries to So king of Egypt, as is stated in *Melakhim*:**

And the king of Ashur found conspiracy in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and offered no present to the king of Ashur, as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Ashur shut him up, and bound him in prison. Then the king of Ashur came up throughout all the land, and went up to Shomeron, and besieged it three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Ashur took Shomeron, and carried Israel away to Ashur, and placed them in Chala, and in Chavor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of Madai. **(II *Melakhim* 17:4-6)**

**This eventually led to Ashur's conquest of the kingdom of Shomeron and its exile to Ashur, as the prophet describes here in our chapter in verse 10.**

**So too the prophet Hoshea condemned these political connections of Efrayim: "**And Efrayim is become like a silly dove, without understanding; they call to Egypt, they go to Ashur" (*Hoshea* 7:11). And in the continuation: "Efrayim strives after wind, and follows after the east wind; all the day he multiplies lies and desolation; and they make a covenant with Ashur, and oil is carried into Egypt" (*Hoshea* 12:2).

**The Actions of the Kingdom of Yehuda – Oholiva (VV. 11-21)**

**The harlotry of the kingdom of Yehuda is more severe than that of its sister kingdom of Israel. Not only did it not learn a lesson from what happened to the kingdom of Shomeron, but its actions of harlotry are even more severe. Already in chapter 16 the prophet Yechezkel surveyed some of the earlier periods of Israel, announcing the abominations of Jerusalem. He employs the parable of a foundling girl taken in by God who later marries her, and she betrays God with anybody who passes by, giving him of all the good that God had given her. What is described here is harlotry with the people of Egypt and also with the people of Ashur.**

**Afterwards, the prophet compares her sins to those of Sodom, on the one hand, and those of the kingdom of Shomeron, on the other, and he asserts that she corrupted her actions more than they did, as the prophet described earlier:**

And your elder sister is Shomeron, that dwells at your left hand, she and her daughters; and your younger sister, that dwells at your right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. Yet have you not walked in their ways, nor done after their abominations; but in a very little while you dealt more corruptly than they in all your ways. As I live, says the Lord God, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters… And they were haughty, and committed abomination before Me; therefore I removed them when I saw it. Neither has Shomeron committed even half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all your abominations which you have done. You also bear your own shame, in that you have given judgment for your sisters; through your sins that you have committed more abominable than they, they are more righteous than you; yea, be you also confounded, and bear your shame, in that you have justified your sisters. **(*Yechezkel* 16:46-52)**

**So too the prophet Yirmeyahu describes the bleak reality that he sees in the kingdom of Yehuda at the beginning of his prophecy in the days of Yoshiyahu:**

And the Lord said to me in the days of Yoshiyahu the king: Have you seen that which backsliding Israel did? She went up upon every high mountain and under every leafy tree, and there played the harlot. And I said: After she has done all these things, she will return to me; but she returned not. And her treacherous sister Yehuda saw it. And I saw, when, forasmuch as backsliding Israel had committed adultery, I had put her away and given her a bill of divorcement, that yet treacherous Yehuda her sister feared not; but she also went and played the harlot… Even the Lord said to me: Backsliding Israel has proved herself more righteous than treacherous Yehuda. **(*Yirmeyahu* 3:6-11)**

**The emphasis in Yirmeyahu's prophecy is that the kingdom of Yehuda saw the punishment received by the kingdom of Israel, but nevertheless continued in its way and sinned in an even worse manner. The prophet Yechezkel emphasizes that Israel served Yehuda as a model to imitate, and therefore the possibility of sin was easier.**[[2]](#footnote-2)

**In the continuation, the prophet Yechezkel describes how images engraved on the wall painted in beautiful colors cause Oholiva, i.e., the kingdom of Yehuda, to act the harlot with the idolatrous kingdoms. The reliefs are of warriors and rulers who stir up her lust. Among other things, mention is made of Chaldean images engraved in Sheshar, the reference being to the kingdom of Babylonia. The prophet describes images of officers riding on horses, with girdles around their loins and turbans on their heads.**

**The Punishment of the Kingdom of Yehuda, Oholiva (VV. 22-31)**

**The prophet describes the arrival of the lovers, the original people of Babylonia, the Chaldeans, all of the people of Ashur and people from other countries. All of these people will gather with their full military gear and judge the kingdom of Yehuda. Their judgments are much more severe than those of the Torah. With a view to overthrowing Oholiva, they will take the priestly garments and the Temple vessels. God will cause her harlotry with Egypt to cease, deliver her into the hands of her enemies who will leave her bare and naked, and Oholiva will drink of the cup of Ohola. Just as there are similarities regarding the sins, there are similarities regarding the punishments. Therefore, the kingdom of Yehuda will end with exile and destruction.**

**The Abominations in the Temple, the Harlotry with Distant People, and the Punishment**

**The prophet mentions forbidden sexual relationships (adultery), bloodshed, and idolatry, impurity of the Temple, and Shabbat desecration. On the same day that the people of the kingdom of Yehuda burned their children for Molekh, they came to the Temple and desecrated it. It is possible that some of the sins were committed in the Temple itself. The prophet describes how Ohola and Oholiva adorned themselves in order to find favor in the eyes of the nations who came to them and committed harlotry with them. Their judges are more righteous than they are and will carry out the sentences of the adulteresses and killers. The people will stone them to death, slice them with their swords and burn their houses down. The result will be that lewdness will cease in the land.**

**The prophecy in our chapter is one of the most severe prophecies, with a sharp and detailed description of the various sins the preceded the destruction. The prophet Yechezkel seems to want to shock his audience so that they might relate more responsibly and seriously to the severity of their offences and the severity of the punishment.**

**The chapter is located before chapter 24 which describes what happened on the tenth of Tevet in the ninth year of Tzidkiyahu's reign, the day on which a siege was laid on Jerusalem. To a certain extent, this chapter concludes this part of the book of *Yechezkel* which describes in detail the prophet's prophecies of doom that were delivered before the destruction, and summarizes some of the prophecies recorded in the previous chapters.**

**If we consider this chapter as the prophet's summary of the history of Israel, we understand that the destruction is a result of forbidden connections, both political and spiritual. Prohibited covenants led to many transgressions, both in the realm of the relationship between man and God and in the realm of interpersonal relationships. The detailed account of the harlotry on different planes comes to teach a lesson that will allow for the beginning of repair and worthy new life before God.**

**Owing to the fact that Ohola and Oholiva sinned with forbidden sexual relations, bloodshed, impurity of the Temple, Shabbat desecration and idolatry, their punishment will be to fall into the hands of strangers who will be considered righteous and will judge them as adulteresses and murderers and punish them with various types of execution. The nations will learn from them not to do as the kingdom of Shomeron had done, and they will recognize and know that the Lord is God.**

**In the next *shiur* we will examine *Yechezkel*, chapter 24.**

**(Translated by David Strauss)**

1. "And he drank of the wine, and became drunk; and he was uncovered within his tent" (*Bereishit* 9:21). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Yechezkel may also be alluding to Achaz's fawning to Ashur at the time of the siege of Jerusalem imposed by Ratzin king of Aram and Remalyahu king of Israel (II *Melakhim* 16:7-11), and to Tzidkiyahu's attempt to rebel against Babylonia with the help of Egypt (*Yechezkel* 17:15). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)