YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:**

**THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

**By Rav Yitzchak Etshalom**

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Dedicated by Rav Yitzchak and Stefanie Etshalom

in memory of Rabbi Aaron Wise z"l,

Rav Etshalom's father, on the occasion of his 20th yahrzeit - 21 Tammuz

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**Shiur #48**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**The Fall of Israel**

We are now at the conclusion of our study of the dirge-"seek"-rebuke-hymn-rebuke-"seek"-dirge sequence which comprises the first seventeen verses of Chapter 5. In our recent *shiur*, we analyzed Amos's exhortation to "seek the good" which balanced his earlier call to "seek God" and to cease the *derisha* at Beit-El, Gilgal and Beer Sheva.

In this and the next *shiur,* we will analyze the concluding "dirge" segment which is also comprised of two verses (verses 16-17). Unlike the earlier segments of this chiasmus, this one is set off as a separate *parasha setuma* and concludes with Amos's usual signature formula: "*Amar Hashem*.” The next verse begins a *parasha petucha*, clearly marking our section off as independent of what follows.

**THE TEXT**

**VERSE 16: SUMMONS TO LAMENT**

*Lakhein*

Therefore

We have discussed this "bridge-word" earlier (*Shiur* #29). Note that its use is common among the first "wave" of literary prophets (Amos, Hoshea, Mikha and Yeshayahu) — a total of thirty-five occurrences (I'm not counting the six instances in later chapters of *Yeshayahu* which likely belong to a later era), whereas it is quite rare in the Torah or the historiographic books of the Nevi'im (a total of twenty occurrences from *Bereishit* through *Melakhim*). This is understandable, as the genre of prophetic rhetoric, which is hardly found in those nine books, is the natural place for *lakhein*. What is surprising is that the word doesn't appear even once in *Devarim* — which is the classic speech and often seen as the archetype of that genre in *Tanakh*.

Significantly, and following a pattern that we've discerned numerous times, both Yirmeyahu and Yechezkel use this ominous word (almost always introducing a dire threat or punishment) 118 times![[1]](#footnote-1)

That *lakhein* portends a threat is borne out almost immediately by the call to lament (which we will assess forthwith). Both ibn Ezra and Radak read *lakhein* as responding to the assumed condition of the rebuke:

*Lakhein*: if you fail to listen (and heed), therefore (*lakhein*) evil will befall you: "in all the squares there will be wailing” (ibn Ezra ad loc.)

*Lakhein*: if you do not return to Me, evil will befall you to the point that there will be wailing in all the squares (Radak ad loc.)[[2]](#footnote-2)

One final note about *lakhein*. The word nearly always shows up at the beginning of a verse and is usually followed, in one fashion or another, with God's Name(s); often with multiple Names, such as *Elokei Tzevaot*, *Ado-nai* (or both, as in our case). In a sense, the word almost takes on a "drum-roll" effect, part of the rhetorical "pomp and circumstance" (or, more mildly, protocol) of the prophetic declaration of Divine anger and punishment.

*Ko amar Hashem Elokei Tzevaot Ado-nai*

Thus says Hashem, the Lord of Hosts, Lord

As we mentioned in the previous *shiur*, we will address the various approaches to the meaning of the Divine cognomen *Tzevaot* at the end of this chapter (at verse 27).

The use of the name *Ado-nai*, which is uncommon in the Torah (a mere fifteen occurrences) and the historiographic books of the *Nevi'im* (only seventeen instances in the 147 chapters of *Yehoshua*, *Shoftim*, *Shemuel* and *Melakhim*), becomes a common feature of the rhetorical landscape in the works of the literary prophets, reaching a crescendo with Yechezkel, who uses this Name 222 times. In other words, in the phrase that we are assessing, we are seeing phrasing that is almost an innovation of the literary prophets; but from that point on, it becomes a regular part of the lexicon. Since Amos is among the earliest (if not the earliest) of the literary prophets, it may be the case that we are looking at the introduction of these rhetorical features.

Is there reason to consider that the introduction of both *lakhein* and *Ado-nai* at this point is not coincidental? There certainly is.

The task of the literary prophets is to address the people, exhort them, inspire them — and, to some extent, frighten them into a serious reconsideration of their behavior. All of this is done with the aim of generating a wholesale social and religious renaissance. The "ominous" *lakhein* is part of that rhetorical scheme. The introduction of a Name for God which means "My Master,” with the royal honorific of plural (*Ado-nai* instead of *Adoni*) which, through David's reign, is used to directly address God,[[3]](#footnote-3) now serves to talk **about** God.

Even in *Melakhim*, where *Ado-nai* is used to describe God, it is not in a frightening sense, but rather to enhance the "master" of the Ark,[[4]](#footnote-4) the One who took us out of Egypt[[5]](#footnote-5) or the Lord Who fights Israel's wars.[[6]](#footnote-6) Indeed, Shelomo is the first to use *Ado-nai* in this non-direct sense — perhaps because as the first heir to the throne, it is necessary for him to declare, clearly and without hesitation, that Hashem is the only Master (see *Shoftim* 8:23).

*Be-khol rechovot mispeid*

In all the squares there shall be wailing

As rendered here, *rechov*, which in modern Hebrew means "street,” refers to the public square in *Tanakh*. For instance, when the two visitors come to Sedom, they insist on sleeping in the public square: “*Lo, ki va-rechov nalin,”* “No, we will sleep in the square”(*Bereishit* 19:2); when the Torah commands us to destroy all of the belongings of the *ir ha-nidachat*, the directive is to gather all of its "loot" *el tokh rechovah —* to the city square (*Devarim* 13:17).

Although the word appears sparsely in the early narrative sections of *Tanakh* (only six times from *Bereishit* through *Shemuel*), it seems to take on a renewed significance in the rhetoric of the prophets (again!). It is the place of public mourning and wailing (*Yeshayahu* 15:3) or the place of desolation during a plague (see *Yirmeyahu* 9:20) or devastation (*Eikha* 4:18). It is the place where pathetic children, starving to death, are taken by their mothers to beg for food (*Eikha* 2:11-12). In a beautiful turnabout on the descriptions of Yirmeyahu (both in his eponymous book as well as in *Eikha*), Zekharya prophesizes that:

*Od yeishevu zekeinim u-zkeinot bi-****rchovot*** *Yerushalayim*

Old men and women will once more live in the **plazas** of Yerushalayim

*Ve-ish mishanto be-yado, mei-rov yamim*

Each one leaning on a cane because of advanced age

***U-rchovot*** *ha-ir yimale’u yeladim vi-yladot mesachakim bi-****rchovoteha***

And the **plazas** of the city will be filled with young boys and girls, playing in her **plazas** (*Zekharya* 8:4-5)

The squares which had been the site of young children starving in the helpless and desperate embrace of their mothers; the squares which were the gathering place of unwelcome guests (*Bereishit*), of public destruction of idolatry (*Devarim*) or of public lament (*Yeshayahu*) now become a place of celebration and the symbol of revivification and return.[[7]](#footnote-7)

*Hesped/ Mispeid*

*Mispeid*, a word that since rabbinic times has meant "eulogy,” means "mourning" in *Tanakh*. (Thus it is yet another example of a word which has evolved since biblical times) This is easily evidenced by the first instance of the verb in *Tanakh*:

*Vayavo Avraham* ***li-spod*** *le-Sara ve-livkotah*

And Avraham came ***li-spod*** Sara and to weep over her (*Bereishit* 23:2).

This stands in opposition to eulogizing, which is not itself an expression of grief, but rather a speech intended to elicit painful reactions on the part of those assembled. Thus, in BT *Berakhot* 6b, Rav Sheshet states: *“Agra de-hespeida daloyei,”* “The weeping it elicits is the reward for a eulogy.”[[8]](#footnote-8)

Clearly, Avraham is engaging in mourning for his just-deceased wife, with both formal mourning (*li-spod*) as well as weeping (*ve-livkotah*).

In the only other use of the root in Torah, when Ya’akov's funeral cortege stops at Goren Ha-atad, the Torah states, “***Vayispedu*** *sham* ***mispeid*** *gadol ve-khaveid,”* “They mourned there, a great and heavy mourning”(*Bereishit* 50:10). The verse concludes: “*Vaya'as le-aviv* ***eivel*** *shivat yamim,”* “He made for his father mourning for seven days.”

In other words, ***hesped*** is a formal part of mourning rituals. (See also *Kohelet* 3:5 where *eit* ***sefod*** is positioned against *eit rekod*. Dancing or skipping is usually seen as the polar opposite of mourning; see, *inter alia*, *Tehillim* 30:12.[[9]](#footnote-9))

As such, the translation presented here, "In all the squares there shall be wailing," is at least misleading, if not incorrect. It might best be rendered as "in all the squares there will be [the sounds of] mourning.” This meaning also fits the rest of the verse: *"Ho-ho!"* "Alas, alas!" is hardly a eulogy; it is a cry of grief and desperation, best defined as mourning.

*U-vkhol chutzot yomeru "Ho-ho!"*

and in all the streets they shall say, “Alas! alas!”

*Chutzot* is the parallel to *rechov*; it is, ironically the **biblical** word for "streets,” although the urban setting of biblical times hardly had streets in a way that we would recognize. The *chutzot* (literally "outer areas") seems to refer to the marketplaces of the city, as distinct from the *rechov* which is used for mass gatherings (see Mishna *Ta’anit* 2:1). It may also mean "outskirts" in the sense of the areas bounding the city limits.

There are numerous calls for (or predictions of) weeping and mourning in the *chutzot* of the city, often in parallel with *rechovot* (e.g. *Yeshayahu* 15:3). Nonetheless, the *chutzot* figure prominently in the anticipated celebration in Yirmeyahu's famous prophecy. Those same *chutzot Yerushalayim* where the people would find desolation (7:34) and would not be able to find justice (5:1) are to be the scene of rebirth and rejoicing:

*Od yishama ba-makom ha-zeh asher atem omerim chareiv hu mei-ein adam u-mei'ein beheima be-arei Yehuda u-vchutzot Yerushalayim ha-nshamot mei-ein adam u-mei'ein yosheiv u-mei'ein beheima; kol sasson ve-kol simcha, kol chatan ve-kol kalla, kol omerim hodu et Hashem Tzevaot ki tov Hashem ki le-olam chasdo, mevi'im toda beit Hashem, ki ashiv et shevut ha-aretz ke-varishona amar Hashem.* (*Yirmeyahu* 33:10-11)

Thus says the LORD: Yet again there shall be heard in this place, whereof you say: It is waste, without man and without beast, even in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without beast, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that say: “Give thanks to the LORD of hosts, for the LORD is good, for His mercy endures forever,” even of them that bring offerings of thanksgiving into the house of the LORD. For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, says the LORD.

As noted, however, the *chutzot* are broadly seen as the twin setting to the *rechovot* and the mourning and desolation (and dearth of justice) associated with one is usually found (or not, such as the case may be) in the other.

The onomatopoetic *"ho-ho"* is one of a variety of phrases used in *Tanakh* to depict wailing. Most closely related to ours is *hoi* (occurs fifty-one times in *Tanakh*, including twice in *Amos*); *aha* (fifteen occurrences, half of which are in *Yirmeyahu* and *Yechezkel*); *oi* (twenty-three occurrences, including twice in the Torah); *avoi* (once matched with *oi* in *Mishlei* 23:29); *ha* (once in *Yechezkel* 30:2) and *oya* (once in *Tehillim* 120:5). A quick skim of the concordance results reveals — no surprise here — that nearly all of these lamentation-cries appear in prophetic literature (we are including *Eikha* in this scope). Some of the concordances regard our singular *ho-ho* as a variant of *hoi-hoi*.

*Vekare’u ikkar el eivel*

They shall call the farmers to mourning

This phrase has three possible avenues of interpretation, none more compelling than the others. Before attending to the syntactical and grammatic issues, we should make note of the possible alliteration employed by Amos — *vekare’u*::*ikkar*. Even though the second letter in the first word is a *kof* and the second letter in "farmer" is a *kaf*, these two sounds may have been close enough even in biblical times (in most current dialects of Hebrew they are virtually indistinguishable) as to be legitimate sound-matches for use in an alliterative flair.

Looking at the phrase itself, there is some (perhaps deliberate) ambiguity. Are the farmers the object of *vekare’u*, being summoned to lament? Alternatively, are the farmers to summon **each other** to lament? Yet a third possibility is that the farmers are being called to summon others to lament, as if the verse stated *ve-ikkar(im) kare'u*.

This last reading may seem to be a stretch, as it assumes a plural verb (*kare'u*) as modifying a singular noun (*ikkar*). Keep in mind, however, that the "farmer" here is almost assuredly an example of a collective singular, a common biblical idiom for depicting a group (e.g. “*shivim nefesh*,” “seventy souls” in *Shemot* 1:5, *Devarim* 10:22, which is literally written “seventy soul,” in the singular). Using the parenthetic example, this read is defensible: in *Shemot* 1, the *shivim nefesh* are defined as “*yotze'****ei*** *yerekh Ya’akov,”* “the one**s** who emanated from Yaakov's loins.”[[10]](#footnote-10) In *Tanakh*'s rhetoric, a collective singular noun can be modified by a plural verb.

Before addressing these three possibilities, we ought to note that this is one of the few instances where *ikkar* appears in *Tanakh* (six all told); the word has its roots in Akkadian, from the Sumerian (*ikkaru*). In two other instances (*Yeshayahu* 61:5 and *Yoel* 1:11) they are matched, as they are here, with the *koremim* (vintners, see the discussion in the next *shiur*). In our verse and in *Yoel*, farmers and vintners are summoned to mourn and the explicit context in *Yoel* is a crop plague which has devastated (or will devastate) the agronomic base. *Yirmeyahu* 14:4 also appropriates the image from Yoel and Amos of the lamenting farmers (without the matched vintners).

THE VIEWS OF THE COMMENTATORS

Rashi has a curious take on our verse: "The groups of farmers who are plowing in the fields will encounter the voice of lament of the mourners crying out in the streets.”

This is a unique take, seeing the verb *vekare’u* with the preposition *el* as meaning "to have sounds meeting each other.” Still, Rashi does address the syntactical problem and understands that the farmers are to be actively involved in the lamentation.

Although at first blush Rashi's understanding may seem a bit awkward, once we assess the structure of this passage, we'll see internal support for his approach.

Ibn Ezra has a different read: "When they observed the commandments of *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*, they would harvest and the farmers would call out to rejoice and feast; now, they(?) will call them(?) to mourning.”

Note how he keeps the syntactical problem at bay, not defining who is calling whom.

Radak presents a clearer picture: “The farmer is the one who toils in the fields and they will call him to come to the mourning, since his work and labor will be for naught, since the seeds and plants have been plagued; they planted but did not reap."

He makes the interaction easy to imagine and follow. Others, who are mourning the destruction of the crops, will direct the farmers to go join the mourners.

Hakham reads our phrase as: "the farmers will announce a lamentation,” building off of the phrasing in *Yeshayahu* 22:12:

***Vayikra*** *Ado-nai Hashem Tzevaot ba-yom ha-hu li-vkhi u-lmispeid…*

And in that day did the Lord, the GOD of hosts, call to weeping, and to lamentation…

He is reading the verb *kara* as making an announcement that weeping and lamentation should ensue.

Alternatively, Hakham suggests, the farmers may be the ones who are summoned to call others to join the lamentation.

Much of this nuanced debate depends on how we read the next phrase and how we see it tied to this one.

*U-mispeid el yode'ei nehi*

And to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation

Note that Amos uses *mispeid* with repeated emphasis; even though the sadness and lamentation is apparently over an agricultural plague, calls for weeping and lamentation are appropriate as if people had died. This is because the destruction of the crop spells famine and widespread suffering, possibly leading to death. The farmers, however, are the first ones to recognize it and to see their own labors bearing no fruit (see Radak's comments above).

The missing verb here would seem to be *vekare’u*, gapped from the previous phrase. The farmers are called to summon mourners and those who are practiced in wailing — or else the farmers are themselves to engage in lamentation and be led by the "wailers" (see the different approaches above).

In both biblical and rabbinic times, there were professional "wailers" whose job was to participate in funerals (see Mishna *Moed Katan* 3:8-9) or in other public displays of sadness (see *Yirmeyahu* 9:16) and to excite the crowd to weeping through their antiphonal lamentation. There is good reason to assume that the book of *Kinot* (which we call *Eikha*) is structured along just these lines and with this intent: to provide a script for lamenters through which they could engage those gathered and inspire them to weep.

Perhaps a structural look at our verse may help solve the question of who is being summoned for whom:

 *1 2*

*A: Be-khol rechovot mispeid u-vkhol chutzot yomeru ho-ho*

*B: Vekare’u ikkar el eivel U-mispeid el yode'ei nehi*

As can be seen here, the passage is structured chiastically. The key word *mispeid* appears at the end of A1 and at the beginning of B2. The two verbs — saying (*yomeru*) and summoning/ calling (*vekare’u*) — appear in A2 and B1. The farmer and those who are in the *chutzot* at the center of the piece, fitting nicely with Rashi's interpretation of the phrase. It seems, then, that the farmers are called to act at the center of the lamentation — not to summon others, but to be the chief wailers.

In our next *shiur*, we will complete our study of this passage, focusing on v. 17, and then take a broader look at the entire sequence.

1. It is prudent to note that both Yirmeyahu and Yechezkel use *lakhein* in contexts which, *prima facie*, seem to be favorable to the audience; e.g. Yirmeyahu, from Chapter 48 on, in his prophecies against the nations, or Yechezkel in Chapter 36, in the prophecy that he is to deliver concerning the mountains of Israel. Even though these prophecies bear what is ultimately glad tidings for the Jewish people, they are tinged with Divine anger and/ or punishment. The sense is that the word *lakhein*, harmless on its own and with no dire meaning, is used in prophetic rhetoric to introduce the Divine action arising from God's wrath. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is unclear if they disagree about the syntax and its pursuant meaning: whether the threat is the lament or that the lament will be the human and natural response to unspoken evils. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. E.g. *Bereishit* 15:2, 8, 20:4; *Shemot* 4:10, 13, 5:22, *Bamidbar* 14:17; *Devarim* 3:24; *Yehoshua* 7:7-8; *Shoftim* 6:15, 22; II *Shemuel* 7:18-20, 28-29 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. I *Melakhim* 2:26, 3:15 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid 8:53. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid 22:6, II *Melakhim* 7:6, 19:23. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. One of my beloved teachers, who taught at a number of seminaries and *yeshivot* attended by foreign students, would annually ask his students who were going back to the States for Pesach to bring back jump ropes and other similar toys. At the first post-Pesach class, he would come to class with a big bag, collect all of the toys and go to one of the poorer neighborhoods of Yerushalayim. He would distribute the toys and sit back, watching children playing *bi-rchovot Yerushalayim* and would weep at the awareness that a prophecy which lay dormant as a Messianic hope for over 2600 years had now been realized and that he had the *zekhut* to witness it and to play a role in seeing it actualized. He has these verses framed on his wall in the entryway to his house, with *Tehillim* 119:97. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See also *Shulchan Arukh,* *YD* 344:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Indeed, this very verse speaks to this definition: "You turned my **mourning** into a dance." [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See also *Shemot* 20:14, *“Ve-khol ha-am (*collective singular) *ro'im* (plural verb) *et ha-kolot…”* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)