YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**BEFORE THE EARTHQUAKE:**

**THE PROPHECIES OF HOSHEA AND AMOS**

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**Shiur #49**

**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 last *shiur*, we began our analysis of the final segment, the closing "dirge.” In this *shiur*, we will first finish up a few remaining unfinished issues relating to verse 16 and then complete our two-part analysis of the section by studying verse 17.

It is prudent to note that this brief two-verse segment 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*. These literary (and graphic) markers indicate that our section is independent of what follows and, as such, forms the conclusion of the dirge-seek-rebuke-hymn-rebuke-seek-dirge chiasmus.

First, let us consider verse 16 as a whole, as we saw in thelast [*shiur*](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-48-prophecies-amos-fall-israel)**.**

**THE TEXT**

**VERSE 16**

*Lakhein*

Therefore

*Ko amar Hashem Elokei Tzevaot Ado-nai*

Thus says Hashem, the Lord of Hosts, Lord

*Be-khol rechovot mispeid*

In all the squares there shall be wailing

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

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

*Vekare’u ikkar el eivel*

They shall call the farmers to mourning

*U-mispeid el yode'ei nehi.*

And to wailing those who are skilled in lamentation.

Note, by the way, how frequently Amos uses the word *mispeid* – it appears a total of fourteen times (as a noun, with various suffixes and prefixes) in all of *Tanakh*, yet Amos uses it three times within these two verses. This highlights the abject mourning and the deliberate intensification of weeping which he anticipates and regarding which he warns his audience. We will revisit this after our analysis of the next verse.

*Yode’ei Nehi*

Before assessing verse 17, there is one bit of "housekeeping" which we did not complete for verse 16: the meaning of *yode'ei nehi* and, specifically, the meaning of the noun *nehi* and its (possibly) related verb.

*Nehi* in *Yirmeyahu* 9

*Nehi* is rendered here as "lamentation" and that does seem to be its meaning in the six other instances in *Tanakh*, all of which appear in prophetic rhetoric. Five of these are in *Yirmeyahu*; and four of those are found in one extended passage: (9:9, 16-19). In this section, Yirmeyahu first speaks of his own mourning, seemingly in isolation and perhaps intending to stir weeping and wailing among his countrymen. Note, as Shadal points out (ad loc.) that the prophet interrupts the prophetic pronouncement (in God's Name) to express his own desire to go to the mountains and weep.

*(9) Al he-harim esa vekhi va-****nehi*** *ve-al ne'ot midbar kina, ki nitzetu mi-beli ish over ve-lo shamu kol mikneh; mei-of ha-shamayim ve-ad beheima nadedu halakhu.*

I will take up weeping and wailing for the mountains, and a ***nehi*** for the pastures of the wilderness, because they are laid waste so that no one passes through, and the lowing of cattle is not heard; both the birds of the air and the beasts have fled and are gone.

Then, continuing to broadcast God's words, the prophet describes the impending doom and adjures them:

*(16) Ko amar Hashem Tzevaot, hitbonenu ve-kiru la-mekonenot u-tvo'ena*

*Ve-el ha-chakhamot shilchu ve-tavona.*

*(17) U-tmaherna ve-tisena aleinu* ***nehi***

*Ve-teiradna eineinu dima ve-afapaeinu yizelu mayim.*

*(18) Ki kol* ***nehi*** *nishma mi-Tziyon eikh shudadnu, boshenu meod ki azavnu aretz, ki hishlikhu mishkenoteinu.*

*(19) Ki shemana nashim devar Hashem ve-tikach oznekhem devar piv;*

*ve-lameidena venoteikhem* ***nehi*** *ve-isha reutah kina.*

16) Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider, and call for the mourning women to come; send for the skillful women to come.

17) Let them make haste and raise a ***nehi***over us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush with water.

18) For a sound of ***nehi***is heard from Zion: 'How we are ruined! We are utterly shamed, because we have left the land, because they have cast down our dwellings.'"

19) Hear, O women, the word of the LORD, and let your ear receive the word of his mouth; teach to your daughters a ***nehi***, and each to her neighbor a dirge.

The meaning of *nehi* here seems to be clear; it is juxtaposed in 9:9 to *bekhi* (weeping), presented in parallel with *dima* (tears) at 9:17 and as a parallel to *kina* in 9:19. The "invitation" of verse 16 is issued to the professional wailers, so the *nehi* in which they are to engage seems to have an uncontestable meaning. Even in v. 18, when we hear a voice of *nehi* with no paired noun for explication, the context is quite clear — even setting aside the abundance of evidence from the surrounding verses.

Ceasing *Nehi*

In what is an example of prophetic elegance, Yirmeyahu uses ***nehi*** once more; however, here God is not calling for the lamentation to begin, but rather for it to cease:

*Kol be-Rama nishma* ***nehi*** *vekhi tamrurim, Rachel mevaka al baneha…* (31:14)

In this beautiful and well-known prophecy of consolation, God Himself turns to console the weeping Rachel, weeping for her sons who "are not" (not there, not alive, not free?). He comforts her that "there is a reward for your toil, "they will return from the land of the enemy" and "the sons will return to their border" (31:14-16). The same bitter ***nehi*** which God encouraged in anticipation of the destruction is the ***nehi*** that God promises to remove and heal.

*Nehi* in *Mikha*

The most intense use of *nehi* undoubtedly is in the only other appearance outside of ours and the five in *Yirmeyahu*. Mikha, prophesying during roughly the same period as Amos, states:

*Ba-yom ha-hu yisa aleikhem mashal ve****naha nehi nihya*** *amar shadod neshadunu cheilek ami yamir; eikh yamish li le-shoveiv sadeinu yechaleik.*

In that day they shall take up a taunt song against you, ***venaha nehi nihya*** (wail with bitter lamentation), and say, "We are utterly ruined; he changes the portion of my people; how he removes it from me! Among our captors he divides our fields." (2:4)

*Vayinahu*

While the nominal use is always "wailing" (or some variation, depending on translation), the verbal form appears in one context which makes this translation difficult. After the *Aron Ha-brit* is miraculously returned from Peleshet to the residents of Beit Shemesh (*I Shemuel* 6), it is then deposited in Kiryat Ba’al/ Ba’ala, known by its "Jewish" name of Kiryat Ye’arim:

*Vayhi mi-yom shevet ha-aron be-Kiryat Ye’arim, vayirbu ha-yamim vayihyu esrim shana;* ***vayinahu*** *kol Beit Yisrael acharei Hashem.*

From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiryat Ye’arim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel ***vayinahu*** after the LORD.

Some translations render the word ***vayinahu*** as "lamented," following the meaning of the noun. This is an awkward translation and contextually makes little sense; besides which the preposition that follows (*acharei)* doesn't sit well with "lamented.” Others translate it as "longing," which fits the context and the syntax much more smoothly. The difficulty with this interpretation is that this meaning of the root *nun-hei-hei* seems unattested. Rashi and R. Yosef Kara (see below), however, associate it with:

*…lo meihem ve-lo mei-hamonam ve-lo mei-hemeihem ve-lo* ***noah*** *bahem*

…none of them shall remain, nor their abundance, nor their wealth; neither shall there be **anyone longing**[[1]](#footnote-1) for them.[[2]](#footnote-2) (*Yechezkel* 7:11)

Rashi, R. Yosef Kara (in the commentary attributed to him*)* and Radak (*I Shemuel* 7:2) cite both meanings and broadly explain "lamenting" as mourning their own wrongdoings that led to the *Aron Ha-brit* being taken from them.

This is, as stated above, a difficult interpretation. First of all, lamentation is a response to an irrevocable loss; we have other words for reflection, repentance and so forth. Secondly, as stated, the preposition "after" just doesn't work with "lamenting": we lament "over" or "about," not "after.”

The Dictionaries

Brown-Driver-Briggs reads all instances of *nun-hei-hei* as "mourning, lamentation" and explain the phrase in I *Shemuel* 7 as "went mourning after.” Koehler & Baumgartner,[[3]](#footnote-3) however, assume two distinct meanings. The first is "to moan" and "to lament.” The second entry is "to follow eagerly.” Klein, in his *Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English,* automatically assumes two separate meanings and cites the instance in I *Shemuel* 7 as a *hapax legomenon*, meaning "was attracted by, longed for.”

In any case, we will certainly understand *yode’ei nehi* as "those who are knowledgeable in (or experts in) lamentation.” However, our brief foray into etymology may shed a bit of new light on the meaning here.

If we accept Koehler & Baumgartner's (and Klein's) take, that there are two distinct meanings, but keep in mind that not only are the radicals the same three letters (*nun-hei-hei*), but also that the meaning is clearly in the same semantic field (feeling a sense of loss), we may interpret Amos's use of *nehi* as a clever combination of the two meanings. Unlike Yirmeyahu who is speaking to a nation on the cusp of destruction, Amos's mission is essentially one of inspiring reflection and repentance. Perhaps those who are *yode’ei nehi* understand what it means to **long after** a better life, and grasp that if they fail to shift attitudes in that direction, they will soon be **lamenting** their fate. This overlapping meaning may also be operating in the intense verse in *Mikha* which we cited above.

We now turn to the second verse.

**VERSE 17:**

**LAMENT IN THE VINEYARDS**

*U-vkhol keramim mispeid*

And in all vineyards there shall be wailing

This phrase seems to support one of the approaches to the "summoning the farmers to lament" in the previous verse (see last week's [shiur](https://www.etzion.org.il/en/shiur-48-prophecies-amos-fall-israel)). Noting that there will be mourning **in** the vineyards seems to argue in favor of reading *“Vekare’u ikkar el eivel”* as meaning "Summon the farmers to lament" (i.e. they will be mourning the devastated crop).

Celebration and Mourning in the Vineyards

That the vineyards are a locus of celebration is attested in *Tanakh*, in the story of the grape-harvest festival mentioned at the end of *Sefer Shoftim*. To recap, when the tribe of Binyamin is nearly decimated after the civil war in the aftermath of the concubine of Giva episode, the rest of the tribes try to find wives for the severely diminished tribe. Since the other tribes have all taken an oath not to give their daughters in marriage to Binyamin (and all of the women of Binyamin have been killed), the only solution is to find girls from other tribes who would then be "seized" by the (recently widowed) soldiers of Binyamin.

In *Shoftim* 21:19, the remnant is told that there is a festival to God in Shilo, which takes place every year, and they are given exact directions to the place of the celebration (below modern day Ma’aleh Levona, in the vicinity of the village of Luban). They are told to lay in ambush in the vineyards and when the girls come out to dance there, they should each abduct a girl and take her for a wife(!), thus circumventing the self-generated prohibition to "give of our daughters to Binyamin as a wife" (ibid vv. 20-22).

Based on the sectarian calendar found in Cave 4 (4QMMT), it seems that this festival is the "grape-harvest feast" which, in their calendar, takes place on the fifteenth of Av. (This supports the theory that the festival of *Shoftim* 21 is the same as that mentioned in the Mishna*, Ta’anit* 4:8).[[4]](#footnote-4)

Mourning in the vineyards is, in a sense, the apotheosis of tragedy. This tragic image is used elsewhere in prophetic literature; see *Yeshayahu* 16:10 and *Yirmeyahu* 48:33. To have mourning in the vineyards means that the focal point of rejoicing, the source of wine "which gladdens God and man" (*Shoftim* 9:13), has been turned sour; the heart of celebration has been stabbed by devastation.

*Ki e'evor be-kirbeikh*

For I will pass through the midst of you

This is an unanticipated ending. We would think that the devastation and subsequent mourning would be occasioned by God's "hiding His face" (see *Devarim* 31:18). Surprisingly, the prophet anticipates the **proximate cause of mourning** to be God's immanent Presence among the people.

In *Tanakh*, there are two competing models about the impact of God's Presence. On the one hand:

Then My anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall come upon them; so that they will say in that day: “Are not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?” (*Devarim* 31:17)

God's Presence is assumed to be salvific and protective — and defeat, exile and oppression are all indicators of God's Absence.

On the other hand, when the *Aron Ha-brit* is miraculously returned to the land of Yehuda, after being taken by the Pelishtim in war, we read that the citizens of Beit Shemesh celebrate joyously and then:

And He smote of the men of Beit Shemesh, because they had gazed upon the ark of the LORD, even He smote of the people seventy men, and fifty thousand men; and the people mourned, because the LORD had smitten the people with a great slaughter. (*I Shemuel* 6:19)[[5]](#footnote-5)

Famously, when God appears before Moshe to confirm His forgiving the Israelites for the Golden Calf:

And He said: “You cannot see My face, for man shall not see Me and live.” (*Shemot* 33:20)

Even Moshe, who is able to "gaze at the visage of God" (*Bamidbar* 12:8), will die if he sees God too intensely (he is spared by being able to see God's "back" in *Shemot* 33:23).

Nevertheless, Yeshayahu promises that when circumstances provide for it:

Yet shall not your Teacher hide Himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher. (*Yeshayahu* 30:20)

There are numerous verses which pull in each direction: of God's Presence being something to desire, a source of life and blessing — yet, on the other hand, a source of destruction and death.

There are, *prima facie*, several approaches we might take to resolve this apparent contradiction.

First of all, we might posit that the nature of "God's Presence" is fully dependent on the cause of that "sudden" immanence. If God is appearing in response to sinful behavior, His Presence is frightening and potentially lethal. On the other hand, if He appears in response to oppression, exile or a threat to His people, then we would assume the manifestation of His *Shekhina* to be protective and comforting. Metaphysically, we would then distinguish between what might conveniently be called *middat ha-din,* the attribute of justice, and *middat ha-rachamim*, the attribute of mercy or compassion. What this means is that God's Essence is not static and that how He appears depends on the root cause of His "appearance.”

Alternatively, we might posit that God's Presence is a static, intense reality and that the difference in impact is completely dependent on the recipient. By way of example (and all examples to illustrate metaphysical realities are definitionally poor), bright sunshine is intense: it can be threatening and dangerous to someone who has no protection, but it can be warm, comforting and potentially healing to someone whose body is acclimated appropriately. In the same way (so to speak), God's Presence may be an unchanging essence; but if the people are longing for Him, prepared for an intensification of their spiritual senses and looking to raise their sense of sanctity, then that Presence can be warm and protective. If, on the other hand, the people are still mired in their sinful ways, looking in every direction but "up" and so forth, then God's Presence is indeed threatening. This is the intent of Resh Lakish's observation regarding the "bright sun" of *Malakhi* 3:20:

There is no Gehinnom in the world to come, rather *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* will take the sun out from its cover, the righteous will be healed by it and the wicked will be judged by it… (*BT Nedarim* 8b)

There are a number of other approaches we might take, but these avenues would take us beyond the scope of this passage. Still, we are hardly done with the topic.

Amos's mention of God's passing among the people as a frightening thing is an elegant bit of foreshadowing for the next prophecy about *Yom Hashem*. We will discuss that in the next *shiur,* as well as picking up this discussion about the impact of God's Presence.

*Amar Hashem.*

Says Hashem.

Amos uses his familiar signature form to indicate the end of this prophecy and to reconfirm the Master in whose name he speaks.

**RECAP OF THE ORACLE**

In this seventeen-verse prophetic speech, Amos builds a masterful chiasmus with a beautiful praise-hymn occupying the "pride of place" at the fulcrum. The entire piece is couched in lamentation, but note how the lamentation evolves.

The first section (vv. 1-3) describes a military landslide in which the nation "has fallen and will never rise again,” yet the closing dirge is about agricultural crisis and seems to echo, if a bit, the plagues against Egypt. The first "*dirshu*" section speaks to generic longing and seeking for God and avoiding the same type of longing and seeking after cultic or ancestral worship. The closing "*dirshu*" section, on the other hand, speaks to specific behaviors and attitudes that must be assumed: doing justice and seeking the good. The rebuke speaks to those selfsame interpersonal and social crimes and the corruption of the governing bodies.

In sum, Amos foretells both military loss from across the borders as well as agricultural devastation from within; he associates these with "looking in the wrong places" and a failure to long after God and to seek His Presence.

In the next *shiur*, we will see how Amos responds to the (unspoken, at least as far as we know) self-comforting mantra of "*Yom Hashem”* — that the day of God is coming.

**For Further Study:**

Dancing in the Vineyards: Hayyim Gilad, “Regarding the Dancing Girls (Shoftim 21-BT Taanit 4),” *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World* 19:4 (1974), pp. 589-591.

1. This is a paraphrase of Rashi and R. Yosef Kara's commentary in *Yechezkel*. Many translations render it "preeminence." Curiously, the King James (and NKJV) render it: "neither shall there be wailing for them"! [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. R. Eliezer of Beaugency and Radak, in their commentaries on *Yechezkel*, take the "mourning" approach and render it "no one will be lamenting them." [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Koehler & Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament, Vol. 1,* p. 675. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See also *Shoftim* 9:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is why the *Aron Ha-brit* is subsequently moved up to Ba'ala/ Kiryat Ye’arim, as discussed above. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)