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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IN LOVING MEMORY OF

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August 15, 1968 – July 29, 2012

לע"נ

יהודה פנחס בן הרב שרגא פייוועל ז"ל

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**Shiur #50**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

***Yom Hashem***

Having concluded our study of the seventeen verses which begin Chapter 5 and their chiastic presentation of the anticipated lamentations which the people will experience, we will now turn to a weighty subject which first appears here, in *Amos*, but is prevalent throughout prophetic writings: the anticipated *yom Hashem,* the day of the Lord.

The term is ambiguous in its meaning and simultaneously promising and ominous, appearing in *Yeshayahu* as well as the books of later prophets, as we will see in the next *shiur*.

In this *shiur*, we will present an analysis of the three verses which comprise the *yom Hashem* passage under investigation here. The next *shiur* will focus on a discussion about the broader idea of the day of the Lord.

**THE TEXT**

**VERSE 18**

*Hoi*

Woe unto you

This opening word of lament first appears as a word of mourning over the death of the anonymous *ish ha-Elokim* who comes from the south to Beit El to warn Yerovam ben Nevat about the fate of his "royal sanctuary" there. When the local prophet connives to get the *ish ha-Elokim* to take repast with him in the northern territory (see the full story in *I Melakhim* 13), the latter is killed by a lion; at his burial, the guilty prophet mourns over him *“Hoi achi,” “*Woe my brother.”

The word takes on an expanded usage in the first wave of literary prophecy. It is used twenty-one times, between *Yeshayahu* (eighteen times, aside from two in Chapter 45 and one in Chapter 55, both of which we assume to be later texts), *Amos* and *Mikha* (it doesn't appear in *Hoshea*). Amos uses it twice — here and at the beginning of Chapter 6 — and Mikha uses it once.

Their usages are all of a kind:

*Hoi ha-mitavim yom Hashem*

Woe to those who desire the day of the Lord (*Amos* 5:18)

*Hoi ha-sha’ananim be-Tziyon*

Woe to those who are smug in Tziyon" (*Amos* 6:1)

*Hoi choshevei aven u-fo'alei ra al mishkevotam*

"Woe to those who devise iniquity and work evil upon their beds" (*Mikha* 2:1)

Nearly all of the mentions in *Yeshayahu* similarly address sinful groups, lamenting their behavior and of the anticipated punishment that they will incur. The most concentrated set of these is in *Yeshayahu* 5. (Notice the frequent use of ***lakhein*** here, reminiscent of the introduction to the prophecy of doom in the previous section.[[1]](#footnote-1))

***Hoi*** — Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and you be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land! In mine ears said the Lord of hosts: “Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant. For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one *bat*, and the seed of a *chomer* shall yield an *eifa*.” (vv. 8-10)

***Hoi*** *—* Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that tarry late into the night, till wine inflame them! And the harp and the psaltery, the tabret and the pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither have they considered the operation of His hands. Therefore (***lakhein****)* My people are gone into captivity, for want of knowledge; and their honorable men are famished, and their multitude are parched with thirst. Therefore (***lakhein***) the nether-world has enlarged her desire, and opened her mouth without measure; and down goes their glory, and their tumult, and their uproar, and he that rejoices among them. And man is bowed down, and man is humbled, and the eyes of the lofty are humbled; but the Lord of Hosts is exalted through justice, and God the Holy One is sanctified through righteousness. Then shall the lambs feed as in their pasture, and the waste places of the fat ones shall wanderers eat. (vv. 11-17)

***Hoi*** *—* Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope, that say: “Let Him make speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Yisrael draw nigh and come, that we may know it!” (vv. 18-19)

***Hoi*** — Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that change darkness into light, and light into darkness; that change bitter into sweet, and sweet into bitter! (v. 20)

***Hoi*** *—* Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight! (v. 21)

***Hoi*** *—* Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink; that justify the wicked for a reward, and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him! Therefore (***lakhein***) as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the chaff is consumed in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have rejected the law of the Lord of hosts, and contemned the word of the Holy One of Yisrael. (vv. 22-24)

This is in apposition to the first usage, which is a lament over the one who has **already** died. The elegant evolution of a dirge-word to be used in describing healthy, active people and envisioning their downfall is powerful. To lament the dead is natural and instinctive, an expression understood by all. To lament those who are alive and healthy, who don't understand the road to perdition that they are currently following, is a mark of rhetorical brilliance and has the potential to get through to the self-satisfied audience.

The invocative *hoi* continues to evolve in the biblical period; Yirmeyahu adopts both meanings. He uses it to describe the mourning that will **not** be sung for Yehoyakim (four instances in one verse, 22:18), echoing the original usage in *I Melakhim* 13. He also uses it in the way that Amos does in *Yirmeyahu* 23:1. Several other prophets of the period bridging Yeshaya and Yirmeyahu use it in this way as well (Nachum, Tzefanya, Chavakuk). Curiously, Zekharya (beginning of Second Temple period) turns the meaning of the word around, from a lamentation to a clarion call, summoning the exiles to return home (2:10, 11 — see Rashi, R. Yosef Kara, ibn Ezra and Radak at 2:10).

*Ha-mitavim et yom Hashem*

That desire the day of the Lord

Although we will leave our broader discussion of *yom Hashem* until the next *shiur*, several foundational items ought to be stated here, from the outset. Again, keep in mind that Amos's mention of *yom Hashem* is the earliest one in all of *Tanakh* — it appears (explicitly) neither in the Torah nor in any of the "historiographic" books of *Nevi'im* (*Yehoshua* through *Melakhim*).

Nonetheless, we must presume that the notion of the day of the Lord was a well-known and anticipated event in the cultural consciousness of the people. The fact that Amos has to "correct" those who breathlessly await this august day is all the proof needed. What is the source of this notion?

We have, it would seem, three options here.

First of all, we may find the introduction of the day of the Lord in earlier texts, if only implicitly. However, then we would have to bring not only persuasive arguments as to the interpretation of those texts (they point to *yom Hashem*), but we would also have to demonstrate that these texts **introduce** the idea, rather than **observe**it as an already existent eschatological notion.

Hakham[[2]](#footnote-2) suggests that the premise of *yom Hashem* is found in Moshe's song, *Ha'azinu* (*Devarim* 32:1-43). Indeed, the final ten verses do speak of a time when the nations will be judged with God's sword, concluding:

Rejoice, you nations, with His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants. He will render vengeance to His adversaries, and will make expiation for His land, for His people. (32:43)

However, the verses seem to lack the end-of-days sense of a conclusion of history; they could just as easily be interpreted as describing the constant ebb-and-flow of human history, as the Jewish nation enjoys an august position (described in the beginning of the song), followed by periods of subjugation, persecution and exile. This low period is picked up when things are "righted" and judgement on behalf of the Jews is executed, but that may just be a segue to the next period of subjugation (as witnessed in the judges’ cycle described in *Shoftim* 2:11-19).

A different approach may be suggested here. Perhaps the notion of *yom Hashem* is built in to any theistic system which posits two essential foundations: revelation and providence. So long as the faith-system assumes a direct interaction between God and the people (either directly or through a prophet) **and** it assumes God's constant awareness and involvement with the welfare of His people, perhaps the notion of that relationship coming to a (satisfying?) conclusion is in a direct revelation in which God makes Himself known and all those who have defied Him (by hurting His people) will be shamed and punished.[[3]](#footnote-3) That would mean that the *yom Hashem* which Amos's audience anticipates is a built-in factor of their belief system and understanding of meta-history.

Alternatively, we may posit that the assumption of *yom Hashem* — a day of great and public Divine revelation — may be anchored not in a divine promise (per Hakham), nor in a "built-in" factor of theistic belief; rather it is the natural consequence of the Jewish people's own history. The great birthing moment of the Exodus (see *Yechezkel* 16) finds its culmination at Mount Sinai, when the entire nation "meets" God and sees the thunder, hears the lightning (see *Mekhilta* on *Shemot* 20:14) and hears God's voice speaking with Moshe (and, perhaps with all of them) from the cloud that covers the mountain.

This foundational moment of our history, it may be argued, is not only a pillar of the past but a (wistful?) hope for the future — that such a revelation, in which God's presence will be made known — will be increased and expanded to include all of humanity.

One way or the other, it is clear from our verses that the people are familiar with a notion of *yom Hashem*; Amos does **not** disabuse them of the notion but sharply corrects their assumptions about what that day will bring.

*Lama zeh lakhem yom Hashem?*

Wherefore would you have the day of the Lord?

Put simply, the prophet immediately quashes the naive fascination with the advent of *yom Hashem* which the citizens of Shomeron believe will at once serve to finally defeat their enemies as well as to demonstrate — regionally if not universally — their status as God's chosen nation. It is possible that their belief at this time is substantiated by the king's military successes in returning territory on the eastern border to Israel's control:

He restored the border of Yisrael from the entrance of Chamat unto the sea of the Arava, according to the word of the Lord, the God of Yisrael, which He spoke by the hand of His servant Yona the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gat Chefer. For the Lord saw the affliction of Yisrael, that it was very bitter; for there was none shut up nor left at large, neither was there any helper for Yisrael. (*II Melakhim* 14:25-26)

Remember that this is the king who ruled during Amos's career — and whom Amos will (in)directly confront in the short narrative in Chapter 7. If, during his era, there was a sense of military ascendance, this may have contributed to an atmosphere of "Messianic times,"[[4]](#footnote-4) which may have inspired an anticipation of *yom Hashem*.

*Hu choshekh ve-lo or*

It is darkness, **not** light

The people clearly expect this to be a day of light; Amos's point, as we see immediately, is that the *yom Hashem* that they anticipate is nothing like what they imagine.

As we will see in the next *shiur*, the motif of darkness is common to descriptions of the day of the Lord not only in *Tanakh*, but also in Ancient Near Eastern texts. We will consider many of these texts in the next *shiur*; in the meantime, we should point out the similarities between this description and the description of "that day" in *Zekharya* 14:

And it shall come to pass **in that day,** that there shall not be light, but heavy clouds and thick. (v. 6)

However, he returns to the darkness in the next verse:

And there shall be one day which shall be known as the Lord's, not day and not night; but it shall come to pass, that at evening time there shall be light. (v. 7)

The darkness foretold here is likely to be understood, as R. Eliezer of Beaugency proposes, "that it will not come to be light, for numerous troubles will come one after the other then."

**VERSE 19**

*Ka-asher yanus ish mipenei ha-ari*

As if a man did flee from a lion

This phrase seems to be missing something either at the beginning or the end. We would expect the day’s darkness either as a preface to the analogy of the lion, bear and snake; or as a set-up the conclusion “so will this day be" (*kein ha-yom ha-hu)*.

The silence of the text forces us to read this verse as the explication of the "darkness" in the previous (and next) verse — this is what the prophet means by *choshekh*. It isn't to be understood as literal darkness (as in the plague of Egypt), but rather as constant shadow of doom hanging over the people, such that even if they successfully avert one threat, another awaits them immediately, without even a respite from the first.

Parenthetically, this turns the question in on itself — why describe the troubles as "darkness" and not "war" or "plagues"? One answer that we have already touched on is that the general motif of *yom Hashem* in *Tanakh* (and external sources) consistently uses "darkness" as the model for the ominous nature of that day. In our case, however, there may be another consideration. In the previous passage, Amos interjects a praise-hymn to God which includes this line:

*Ve-hofeikh la-boker tzalmavet ve-yom laila hechshikh.*

He turns the shadows into clear morning and darkens the day with night.

This may influence Amos's use of the "darkness" motif here, although when getting into the specifics, it is closer to the plague of *arov* (wild animals) than that of *choshekh*.

*U-fega'o ha-dov*

And a bear met him

In this image, the man is not confronting his attackers (the lion, bear and snake); the best that he can do is to escape their predatory behavior. Contrast this with David's own story about saving the flock:

And David said unto Shaul: “Your servant kept his father's sheep; and when there came a lion, or a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth; and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him.” (*I Shemuel* 17:34-35)

Lions and bears appear in numerous places in *Tanakh* as attackers – sometimes (as in David's story) together, but usually apart. A lion kills the *ish ha-Elokim* (see above) and lions attack the new Shomeronim (*II Melakhim* 17), whereas two bears come out of the forest to kill forty-two young lads who insult Elisha (*II Melakhim* 2:24). Both species are seen as terrifying beasts afraid of no one, and anyone who escapes from an encounter with either is considered blessed to survive. Imagine, then, escaping the lion only to encounter the bear! The person having this series of "misfortunes" would certainly have reason to feel that there is "no way out" and that danger lurks behind every corner.

*U-va ha-bayit ve-samakh yado al ha-kir*

And went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall

Now, our woebegone friend has escaped not one, but two, terrors and has come to the safety of his home. Presumably, wild beasts like lions and bears do not attack in domestic environments.

"Leaning his hand on the wall" is a sign of resting, of weariness after tribulation. Our ill-fated friend is "taking a breather" and expressing relief after having escaped the terrors outside, when…

*U-nshakho ha-nachash*

And a serpent bit him

All of his running comes to naught as the danger attacks him from inside his own house. This seems to be an expansion of the line in *Ha’azinu*:

*Mi-chutz teshakel cherev u-meichadarim eima*

Outside the sword shall bereave; and in the rooms, terror; (*Devarim* 32:25)

The image of a chain of terrors, one following the other and chasing the target, such that as soon as he is saved from one he is attacked by the other, reminds us of Yeshayahu's description of an apocalypse:

Terror, and the pit, and the trap, are upon you, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who flees from the noise of the terror shall fall into the pit; and he that comes up out of the midst of the pit shall be taken in the trap; for the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth do shake (24:17-18)

**VERSE 20**

*Ha-lo choshekh yom Hashem ve-lo or*

Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light?

This final verse of the section perfectly bookends the first, in a direct parallel:

*Hu choshekh ve-lo or* (v. 18)

*Ha-lo choshekh yom Hashem ve-lo or* (v. 20)

This *inclusio* clearly defines the unit and identifies its topic: *yom Hashem* is not the glorious day of victory anticipated, but a day of devastating punishment.

*Ve-afel ve-lo nogah lo?*

Even very dark, and no brightness in it?

The translation (and punctuation) here reflects the opening word of this verse – *ha-lo* – which uses the "rhetorical *hei*" to turn the statement into a question. Instead of "This day is not dark, rather light,” the *hei* upends the meaning to "Is this day not dark and not light?" and the second clause is influenced in kind:

Even very dark, and no brightness in it?

It would seem the *afel* here is a parallel to *choshekh*; however, this is inexact. *Afel*, an unmatched word in *Tanakh*, is an adjective. Perhaps a better translation would be "gloomy" (per BDB). The nominal form, *afeila*, appears a total of ten times in *Tanakh* — most famously (perhaps) in the description of the plague of *choshekh* (*Shemot* 10:22).

In next week's *shiur*, we will explore the theme of *yom Hashem* (and variants) to see how this day is described and envisioned throughout the prophetic canon.

**For Further Study (for the next *shiur*):**

*Yom Hashem*

1. Eliezer Margaliot, "*Yom Hashem* and the End of Days,” *Beit Mikra* 13:2 (1968), pp. 13-27 [Heb.].
2. Eliezer Margaliot, “Once More, Regarding *Yom Hashem,” Beit Mikra* 15:3 (1970), pp. 307-312 [Heb.].
3. Binyamin Oppenheimer, “The Evolution of *Yom Hashem* in *Yeshayahu* 2-4,” *Beit Mikra* 39:2 (1994) pp. 97-132 [Heb.].
4. Meir Weiss, “The Origin of the ‘Day of the Lord’ — Reconsidered,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 37 (1966), pp. 29–60.
1. Note also *Yeshayahu* 1:24: “*Lakhein* says the Lord, the Lord of Hosts, the Mighty One of Yisrael: *hoi*, I will ease Me of Mine adversaries, and avenge Me of Mine enemies.” [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Amos Hakham, *Da’at Mikra: Trei Asar,* Vol. II, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This may be part of the undercurrent of *Shir Ha-shirim*, in which the intense relationship between the lover (in the parable, God) and the beloved (the Jewish people) is never fully realized. It concludes, oddly enough, with the beloved telling the shepherd-king, "Flee, my beloved…" It may be that *Shir Ha-shirim* can only describe the relationship as it has already been experienced, and waiting for the denouement of complete revelation is beyond the range of the parable. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For those of us old enough to remember, this brings to mind the mood in the aftermath of the miraculous days of June 1967. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)