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 #51**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

***Yom Hashem***

**Part II**

In the last *shiur*, we analyzed the three verses which make up Amos's rejection of the naïve optimism surrounding the much-anticipated *yom Hashem*, day of the Lord. As promised, in this *shiur*, we will take a more panoramic look at the prophetic notion of *yom Hashem*. We will try to identify the origins of this idea as well as follow its development within the canon.

As a refresher, here is (translation only) the text of Amos's three verses about *yom Hashem*:

Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light; as if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house and leaned with his hand against the wall, and a serpent bit him. Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light, and gloomy with no brightness in it? (5:18-20)

**A Methodological Note**

Often, as we have seen in this series, when trying to understand the meaning of a **word** or **phrase** in the world of prophetic oratory, we identify the various locations in the canon where that word or phrase appears and analyze them in light of each other, usually following a linear path from early to late appearances in *Tanakh*. This helps us not only to see the word or phrase in its earliest usage and context, but also to see how its meaning becomes either expanded or more narrowly defined.

For instance, in the last *shiur*, we saw how the lament-call *hoi* was originally used to mourn an actual death, with the corpse lying before the one uttering *hoi*. The word evolved to be used to address a group whose behavior, if left uncorrected, would lead to their demise — essentially, an anticipatory *hoi*.

Sometimes, however, this is an insufficient method; when examining a **concept**, we have to cast our net beyond exact words. This concept may be expressed using a variegated selection from a palette of phrases; sometimes each prophet uses his own adage. Sometimes, even one prophet will use a variety of words or phrase to express the same concept.

We find, in this study, that much of the material we examine doesn't explicitly mention *yom Hashem,* but it is clear from the text itself that it is this image of an *eschaton* that the prophet is picturing, a final day of God’s judgement immediately preceding the end of history. We will, as such, **not** address the *yom Hashem* in *Yechezkel* 13:5, which references an event in the past (see there).

In this *shiur*, we will rely on several studies of the concept taken up by scholars of the previous generation and then add our own suggestions. Some of these scholarly articles were listed in the "For Further Study" section at the end of the previous *shiur*. An expanded version appears at the end of this one.

**THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: THREE APPROACHES**

**The Background and the Premise**

As mentioned briefly in the last *shiur*, the notion of a "day of the Lord" is first mentioned by Amos (in our passage); this is the earliest record of it explicitly in the canon. In our instance, it is clearly not a newidea that Amos is introducing. Indeed, the very opposite is the case: Amos is responding to the people's entrenched (and errant) beliefs about *yom Hashem*. Thus, it is a notion that predates its first mention in the canon.

Whenever we encounter a phenomenon of this sort — an idea that is presumed to be valid or true — our first move is to try to discern the origin of this notion. Is it alluded to in an earlier text or stated there explicitly but with alternate terminology? Or is it the natural outgrowth of other axiomatic notions? Or is there something essential about the human condition that causes the notion to be presumed?

I would like to provide examples for each of this to illustrate the method.

First of all, there are theological premises that are presented in one format in one formulation, but then appear with a different (ultimately more popular) phrasing. One example of this is Providence, God's awareness of His people (and, perhaps, of individuals). In the Torah, this notion appears most explicitly in *Devarim* 11:12, in which Moshe explains that the Land to which the Israelites are coming, unlike Egypt, is “a Land which God seeks out (*doresh*), constantly God's eyes are upon it from the beginning of the year to the end of the year."[[1]](#footnote-1) The word which becomes the popular one for this notion is *hashgacha*, anchored in *Shir Ha-shirim* 2:9, where it is an assumed feature of the "lover" (understood traditionally to be God). Thus, if we were to look for the textual roots of *hashgacha,* we would need to know to look it up using a different root, *darosh,* as in *Devarim*.

Secondly, there are theological notions which are logical conclusions emerging from more foundational (given) premises. For instance, given the premise of the Exodus, with its miraculous intervention by God on behalf of His enslaved and beleaguered people, the notion that God "should" be saving His people from distress becomes the next premise, such that Gidon states to the messenger of God (*Shoftim* 6:13): "If God is indeed with us, where are all of His wonders that our ancestors related to us?" It becomes assumed, based on the grand story of national salvation, that tribal salvation is part of the Divine "program".

Finally, there are premises that do not seem to be presented frontally and doctrinally anywhere, yet are assumed to be valid components of the Divine-human relationship. The clearest example of this is prayer. For man (or Man) to beseech God, to thank God, to appeal to God's "better nature" or to sing God's praises, the concept of prayer is a prerequisite; though it is never mandated nor defined formally as part of the Man-God relationship, all of these applications appear organically as early as the first book of the Torah, *Bereishit*, long before there is a possible mandate of worship in the final book of the Torah, *Devarim* (Chapter 6). Thus, in *Bereishit*, we find:

* Kayin and Hevel bring offerings (4:3-5).
* Noach's offerings seem to be some form of "appeasement" to get God to commit to never again flood the world; alternatively, they are thanksgiving offerings for the salvation of his family and their sea-bound menagerie (8:20-22).

* When Avraham learns of the decree to destroy Sedom, he appeals to God (18:23-33).
* When Yitzhak and Rivka’s barrenness becomes troubling, they turn to God in prayer (25:21); when Rivka is upset or confused by her subsequent pregnancy, she seeks God out (ibid. vv. 22-23).

How do these giants of our history know that God is approachable? In addition, how do they know that it is appropriate to approach God with or without offerings, on behalf of others or on behalf of oneself? We would have to posit that the prayerful relationship with the Creator is inherent in our existence as created beings.[[2]](#footnote-2)

These examples should suffice for us. Now the question we must address is the following: is the apocalyptic/ eschatological *yom Hashem* an outgrowth of some earlier passage, a second principle arising from a first principle; or is it something inherent in the relationship between God, Mankind and History?

*YOM HASHEM MINA LAN?*

In the previous *shiur*, I proposed answers to this question — literally, "What is the source for *yom Hashem*?" — using each of these three schemas.

**Approach #1**

Using the first model, we may find the introduction of "the day of the Lord" in earlier texts, if only implicitly. However, then we would have not only to bring persuasive arguments as to the interpretation of those texts, that 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[[3]](#footnote-3) suggests that the premise of the *yom Hashem* is found in Moshe's song of *Ha'azinu* (*Devarim* 32:1-43). Indeed, the final ten verses (and, more explicitly, the final five verses) do speak of a time when the nations will be judged with God's sword and when, ultimately:

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; As we will see in our survey of *yom Hashem* below, the general impression that each gives is that *yom Hashem* is an end of history, a true *eschaton*. The verses in *Ha’azinu*, however, could just as easily be interpreted as describing the constant ebb and flow of human history, when the Jewish people enjoy an august position (described in the beginning of the Song), and which is 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).

It is possible that this is the meaning, at least in some instances, of the phrase “*be-acharit ha-yamim,”* "at the end of days," which, e.g. in *Bereishit* 49:1, is understood as a specific point in the future, but not the end of history.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Approach #2**

Taking the second approach, we may posit that the assumption of a *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, but rather in the natural consequence of the Jewish people's own history. The great birthing moment of the Jewish people is the Exodus (see *Yechezkel* 16) and that great moment finds its culmination at Mount Sinai, when the entire nation "meets" God and sees the thunder, hears the lightning (see *Mekhilta, 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. If we assume that God's Revelation to the Israelites is just the beginning (see *Devarim* 33:2-3 and *Sifrei* ad loc.) and that the ultimate development of that is a universal revelation to set all things right, then the "Day of Judgment" is the natural and reasonable dénouement which should be anticipated.

**Approach #3**

Using our third methodological approach, we might suggest that the notion of a *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** 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.[[5]](#footnote-5) This is similar to our presentation of prayer above.

This 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. As such, it would be the reasonable conclusion of already-established doctrinal axioms.

I believe that this final take is the most persuasive and that the assumed anticipation of a *yom Hashem* should be seen as the natural result of the Jewish people's view of God, history and mankind.

Parenthetically, It is prudent to note that numerous scholars (see von Rad's article and Weiss's treatment of it, both cited below) associate the biblical *yom Hashem* with a mythological "day" in which the gods go to war and, once and for all, vanquish their enemies and demonstrate their supremacy. Although there is much that is curious in these myths, not only our doctrinal perspective but an honest assessment of *yom Hashem* in *Tanakh* precludes associating it with this pagan belief.

*YOM HASHEM* IN *TANAKH* — A SURVEY

As pointed out above, we have to find not only instances of the two-word phrase “*yom Hashem*,” but similar phrases that, contextually, seem to have a parallel intent.

Weiss (cited below) identifies numerous phrases that qualify, such as “*yom charon af Hashem*,” “the day of the Lord's furious anger” (we will yet return to this verse in *Eikha*); “*Hinei yom ba la-Shem,” “*Behold a day comes for the Lord” *(Zekharya* 14:1[[6]](#footnote-6)); and others. (See Weiss's detailed charts at the end of the cited article).

Rosenthal (see cited articles) summarizes thusly: the consensus of biblical scholars, until the midpoint of the 20th century, was that *yom Hashem* was, indeed, an *eschaton* in all places. He disputes this consensus and claims that *yom Hashem* should not be confused with *acharit ha-yamim*, which, he maintains, always implies an "end-of-history" scenario.

Space limitations prevent us from conducting a full survey of the instances of *yom Hashem* and its parallel phrases in the prophetic corpus (I am including *Eikha*). However, as we will see below from a representative sampling, the concept of *yom Hashem* which may well have had its genesis as an "end-of-days" image, is used in two distinct ways in *Tanakh* and each of these two subsequently divides into two — although these secondary divisions are asymmetrical.

When Amos speaks about *yom Hashem*, one thing is clear — it is a day of judgment which his audience has thought would favor them, with God judging their enemies and consigning those enemies to defeat (at least). Amos's news is that a day of judgment will not necessarily favor his audience (more on that below).

When Yeshayahu (who may have borrowed the concept from Amos, who evidently coins the phrase *yom Hashem*) speaks about a day in which idolatry and its adherents will be shamed and man's power will be humbled in the presence of God's power, this is also a day of great revelation which implies judgment.

Both of these images, along with Yoel's frightening day of judgment, Malakhi's “*Ki hinei yom ba,”* “Behold the day is nigh” (which is followed by “*lifnei bo yom Hashem,”* “before the advent of the day of the Lord,” 3:19-23) and *Zekharya's* final chapter are all about an end-of-days scenario, envisioned to be at some point (perhaps a distant one) in the future, when God will judge mankind, will vindicate Yisrael as His people and will punish those who have oppressed His people **or** have worshipped false gods. This would also seem to be the sense and setting of Tzefanya's use of *yom Hashem* in Chapter 1 of his book — and in Chapter 2 (verse 2) when he refers to “*yom af Hashem,”* “the day of the Lord's anger.”

However, when Yirmeyahu refers to the destruction of Yerushalayim at the hands of the Babylonians in 586 BCE as “*yom charon af Hashem,”* “the day of the Lord's furious anger” (does he borrow the phrase from his predecessor Tzefanya?), he is referring to a past event, clearly neither an *eschaton* nor a favorable day for the Jewish people. This assessment — that it references a past event — is true as well for *Yechezkel* 13:5, which refers to a battle already fought, as it is in *Yeshayahu* 9:2 which references *yom Midian,* the day of Midian. Yirmeyahu presents a series of prophecies against the nations (Chapters 46-51), driven by the *yom Hashem* in 46:10, focusing on relatively immediate consequences for the surrounding nations.

*"YOM HASHEM*" — *SHTAYIM SHE-HEIN ARBA* (TWO WHICH ARE FOUR)

It seems then — and the reader is encouraged to read through the numerous passages (all cited in the articles below) which are explications of *yom Hashem* and its variants — that *yom Hashem* is used to refer to immediate events, the details of which are known to the audience, as well as to an eschatological vision of a great day of Divine judgment. The latter seems to be the starting place for it (here in *Amos*) which is why we explained the root of the notion as we did above.

The "known" events further divide into two — those which are part of the past and those which are imminent. This distinction is sharp and easily discerned. Regarding those events in the past (such as the destruction of Yerushalayim), the prophet is using them as a springboard for his oratory or dirge — or as an analogy for a similar devastation about to happen.

The eschatologies divide as well. Some of them, notably *Yeshayahu* 2-4 (see Oppenheimer's article cited below) and *Tzefanya* 1, as well as *Zekharya* 14, are about God's appearance which **inherently** puts those who worshipped idols to shame, defeating the false beliefs in either Man or that which he has fashioned of his own hands.

There is another, which starts with our own passage in *Amos* and plays a central role in *Yoel* 4 as well as *Malakhi* 3 (*et alii*) which is about an actual judgment of the world, calling to account all people for their own deeds, towards each other, towards Israel and, perhaps, towards their own people. This anticipation, held by many belief-driven cultures, generally rests on assumptions rife in the world of paganism: that one god will prove to be mightier than the others (of, course, that will be the god of the people holding this belief) and that his victory over the other gods, the demonstration of his superiority over them, will carry with it victory and vindication for his chose people. This is a piece of pagan belief which, as with all staples of pagan thinking, *Tanakh* takes aim at.

AND BACK TO *AMOS*

Amos's audience seemed to be anticipating the latter type of judgment day — but one, following pagan thought, that would leave them unscathed and victorious. Amos takes their cherished, self-serving belief and turns it on its head.[[7]](#footnote-7) The special status of being God's people does not carry with it a "get-out-of-jail-free" card; rather, the opposite reality obtains. Being a member of God's chosen nation means, as Amos has stated earlier (3:2), a higher bar of expectations for moral behavior and a more severe judgment. Whereas his audience feels that they will skate free when their enemies (Assyria) are judged, with their own moral turpitude overlooked, it is exactly those societal and ethical failings which will bring horror to them when the day of God's judgment comes.

In next week's *shiur*, we will begin the final phase of our study of Chapter 5, studying verses 21-27, first assessing the text itself.

**For Further Study**

*Yom Hashem*

(expanded version of the list from the last *shiur*)

1. Gerhard von Rad, “The Origin of the Concept of the Day of Y-,” *JSS* 4 (1959), pp. 97-108.
2. Eliezer Margaliot, "*Yom Hashem* and the End of Days,” *Beit Mikra* 13:2 (1968), pp. 13-27 [Heb.].
3. Eliezer Margaliot, “Once More, Regarding *Yom Hashem,” Beit Mikra* 15:3 (1970), pp. 307-312 [Heb.].
4. Binyamin Oppenheimer, “The Evolution of *Yom Hashem* in *Yeshayahu* 2-4,” *Beit Mikra* 39:2 (1994) pp. 97-132 [Heb.].
5. Meir Weiss, “The Origin of the ‘Day of the Lord’ — Reconsidered,” *Hebrew Union College Annual*, Vol. 37 (1966), pp. 29–60.

1. It is tempting to argue that *Vayikra* 20:5 describes the same notion in a punitive sense: “I will put my eyes upon that man (who offered his child to Molekh) and his family and I will cut him off along with all those who stray after him…" However, although theologically it appears to be the same principle, phenomenologically the *Devarim* verse is both broader and positive in its sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This was actually the focal point of an essential disagreement between *mori ve-rabbi* HaRav Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l and his father-in-law, *mori ve-rabbi* HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik zt"l ("the Rav"). Whereas the Rav felt that approaching God in prayer was not something that could be done without formal "permission' (in halakhic language, a *mattir*), HaRav Aharon felt that it would have been most cruel for God to create Man, with all of his limitations and needs, and then **not** allow him to beseech his Maker, on Whom he is completely dependent, for sustenance and salvation. The Rav's positions is most clearly presented in his *Ra'ayanot al Ha-tefilla,* p. 245. I heard Rav Lichtenstein zt"l express his respectful disagreement regarding the need for a *mattir* to approach God several times. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Amos Hakham, *Da’at Mikra: Trei Asar,* Vol. II, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See, however, the Midrashic take on the phrase cited by Rashi ad loc. See also R. Yosef ibn Caspi, R. Avraham b. Maimonides and Shadal there. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. 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 and 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 that waiting for the dénouement of complete revelation is beyond the range of the parable. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This entire prophecy is eschatological and contains the well-known image, which may help define, in part at least, the central motif of *yom Hashem:* *“Vehaya Hashem le-melekh al kol ha-aretz, ba-yom ha-hu yihyeh Hashem echad u-shmo echad,”* “On that day, Hashem will be king over the entire land, on that day, Hashem will be one and His Name one” (v. 9). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Contra* Margaliot who interprets Amos's “*choshekh ve-lo or”* in a somewhat tortured manner. The simple read of the verse is that indeed the day will be the opposite of what the people expect. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)