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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"א-ל נא, רפא נא לה";  בתוך שאר חולי ישראל.

**Shiur #52**

**The Prophecies of Amos:**

**Rejection of the *Avoda***

**Part I**

We are about to begin our study of the last passage in Chapter 5, comprising seven verses (21-27). As we will discover, the overall theme is a painful rejection of Divine service, which is powerfully echoed in the first chapter of *Yeshayahu*, which we will quote below. In these first two lectures, we will present the text, with some focused comments on the words and syntax. In the third *shiur*, we will present a broader analysis of the passage and its place within the canon. In the final *shiur* of this section, we will assess the structure and subtle message of the passage.

THE TEXT

**VERSE 21**

*Saneiti, ma'asti chageikhem*

I hate, I despise your feasts

The opening pair of words seem to be a case of overkill, as *sanei* seems to imply (if not mean) whatever *maos* might indicate. Although *sanei* is usually translated as "hate" and *maos* as "reject,” the implication for the sacrificial service is identical. Divine worship (*avodat Hashem* or simply *avoda*) is intended to curry God's favor for the nation and the specific family or individual donor; God's "hating" the offerings is tantamount to His rejection.

A more nuanced look at the verb *sanei* and its antonym *ahav* reflect, however, a more nuanced meaning. Indeed, when standing alone, these verbs are best rendered as "hate" and "love" respectively. However, when presented in the context of a binary choice, a more accurate translation would render *ahav* as "prefer.”

For instance, the Torah presents the respective attitudes of Yitzchak and Rivka to their twin sons as follows:

*Vaye'ehav Yitzchak et Eisav… ve-Rivka ohevet et Ya’akov.* (*Bereishit* 25:28)

This is most accurately translated:

Yitzchak **favored** Eisav… while Rivka **favored** Ya’akov.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Similarly, when God sees that Leah is *senua* (and she defines herself that way), it is far more in line with the broader sense of the story to read it as "less preferred" or "overlooked," as opposed to "hated.”

This same definitional nuance should be applied to the Deuteronomic law (perhaps a comment on Ya’akov, his wives and primogeniture):

*Ki tihyena le-ish shtei nashim, ha-achat ahuva ve-ha'achat senua…*

If a man has two wives, one preferred and the other unfavored… (*Devarim* 21:15)

If we see the sacrificial order as a "yes/ no" question, then "hate" would be the proper translation and our original challenge would be in place. If, however, we see the *Avoda* as an attempt to confirm our special relationship with God, relative to the nations of the world, then *saneiti* might be read as "I disfavored" (in favor of others) and would carry the implication of God choosing to accept the service of other nations over ours. Hence, *ma'asti* is needed to show objective rejection.

Although in an ultimate theological sense, the notion of Divine preference is somewhat "unevolved" — God, of course, has the breadth to favor all peoples without diminishing His love for any of them — nonetheless, within the context of the common beliefs held by Amos's audience, this is likely an accurate description. Perhaps we would be best served understanding the phrase as follows:

I have disfavored (in a relative sense), yea even rejected (in an absolute sense) your festive offerings.

***CHAG***

One brief note on *chageikhem*: The word *chag*, which in rabbinic and modern Hebrew means "feast" and, by default, refers to Sukkot, begins with its biblical meaning in a related but distinct sense.

The root *chet-vav-gimmel* means "circle"[[2]](#footnote-2) and refers to a festive meal eaten in a circle — meaning, with the participants seated/ reclined in a circle, facing each other.

A related example may be found in *I Shemuel* 16, when Shemuel comes to Beit Lechem to lead an offering as a Divinely offered ruse to cover up his real mission, to anoint a new king in lieu of the disfavored Shaul — and he is told only to choose one of Yishai's sons. When he finds that each one is rejected (*maos*) by God, he asks Yishai if "all of the boys are done" (i.e. is there anyone left?), to which Yishai answers, referring to the future king, "The young one still remains." Shemuel responds that Yishai should summon him, “*Ki lo* ***nasov*** *ad bo'o fo,”* "We will not **encircle** until he comes" (v. 11). The meaning is clear: they will not sit in the festive circle to partake of the offering until the youngest boy arrives.

What God here disfavors is "your festive gatherings,” when the people come together to celebrate with an offering.

*Ve-lo ariach be-atzeroteikhem*

And I will no longer delight in your solemn assemblies

I have added the phrase "no longer,” using a bit of license, as that is the mood of the diatribe; it isn't a statement of God's disaffection with offerings *in toto*, but rather a Divine suspension of favoring and accepting the worship. Until this point, as demonstrated throughout *Vayikra*, God "savors" (as it were) the "sweet smell" (*reiach nichoach*) of the offerings; that is why the verb here, *ariach*, which directly speaks to sense (smell), is a marker for Divine "enjoyment" and "acceptance" of offerings.[[3]](#footnote-3)

**THE MULTI-PURPOSE *VAV***

The letter *vav,* ubiquitous as a prefix throughout the canon, carries numerous meanings. In many cases, it is to be read as *vav ha-chibbur* (*vav* conjunctive) and translated as "and.” This occurs when the prefix modifies a word that continues a listing, as in “*Shem* ***ve-****Cham* ***va-****Yafet”* (*Bereishit* 9:18) or when the word is an intensification of the earlier noun, such as “*makat cherev* ***ve-****hereg* ***ve-****avdan”* (*Ester* 9:5).

There are numerous other *vav* usages. The most well-known of these to students of *Tanakh* is *vav ha-hippukh* (*vav* consecutive), which precedes verbal forms and "flips" the tense from future to past as in:

*yelekh* (he will walk) 🡪 ***va****yelekh* (he walked)

Another less common usage is *vav ha-niggud* (*vav* disjunctive) which is best presented as "rather,” as in

*Lo ha-meitim yehalelu Yah ve-lo kol yoredei duma*

The dead will not praise God, nor (*vav* consecutive) those who go down into *duma* (place of silence — the grave)

***Va****-anachnu nevareikh Yah, mei-ata ve-ad olam, Halleluyah*

**However,** we will bless God, from now and forever, *Halleluyah* (*Tehillim* 115:17-18)

Another, relatively uncommon usage of *vav* is *vav ha-biur*, *vav* of clarification (*vav* explicative). The clause followed by the pre-nominal *vav* serves to explain the preceding clause. For instance, when Yosef is seeking his brothers, we read:

*Vayimtza'eihu ish* ***ve-****hinei to'eh ba-sadeh*

A man found him, ***ve***- behold he (Yosef) was straying in the field (*Bereishit* 37:15)

The best translation for ***ve***here would be "because"; i.e. the man found Yosef. Why was Yosef to be found? Because he was lost in the field.

**BACK TO OUR VERSE**

The *vav* at the beginning of our stich is **not** *vav* conjunctive (*vav ha-chibbur)*, as the relationship between the two halves of the verse is not one of similarity or of intensification; rather, it should be read as *vav ha-biur*. In other words, the **reason** that God now disfavors and, indeed, despises the people’s festive offerings is **because** He no longer takes delight in the people’s solemn assemblies. As such, we would read the *atzeroteikhem* of this second clause not as parallel to *chageikhem*. Rather, because the people’s solemn gatherings (discussion below) no longer serve to please God, therefore, He rejects and despises the people’s festive gatherings.

An *atzeret* or *atzara* is a gathering, usually used in the sense of a gathering for purposes of worship, such as in *Devarim* 16:8 (seventh day of *chag ha-matzot*), *Bamidbar* 29:35 (eighth day of Sukkot) and, in the generic, *Yeshayahu* 1:13.

*Atzeret* is used, however, to denote a very different type of gathering by Yirmeyahu; he (9:1) refers to the wayward people as *atzeret bogedim —* a gathering of rebels. This is likely a deliberately ironic use of the word and the essential meaning is still bound up with sanctified gatherings.

Note that Amos here refers to *chagei****khem*** and *atzerotei****khem*** – "**your** feasts" and "**your** gatherings,” as if to point out that God is no longer interested in them and does not see them as motivated or defined by His worship. This evokes Zekharya's response to the query about fasting after the Temple had been rebuilt (Chapters 7-8), in which he states that the fasting and eating are the people's doing, not something God has commanded.

**VERSE 22**

*Ki im ta'alu li olot u-minchoteikhem, lo ertzeh*

Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings, I will not accept them

The word *ki*, used in modern Hebrew to denote causation ("because") is rarely meant that way in *Tanakh*. As Reish Lakish (Palestinian Amora, 3rd c.) points out, "*Ki* has four meanings: if, perhaps, rather, because" (BT *Rosh* *Hashana* 3a).

In legal literature, the word *ki* is often used to introduce the casuistic phrase: *“****Ki*** *yikach ish isha,”* “**If** a man should take a wife” (*Devarim* 24:1); or *“****Ki*** *yitein ish el rei'eihu kesef o kheilim li-shmor,”* “**If** a man should give silver or vessels to his fellow for safekeeping” (*Shemot* 22:6).

In poetry, it is often declarative, "indeed,” such as “*Hodu la-Shem* ***ki*** *tov,* ***ki*** *le-olam chasdo,”* “Give thanks to God, **for** He is good, **for** His kindness is everlasting” (*Tehillim* 118:1); but it can also mean "rather,” such as in the final verses of *Eikha*:

 ***(****Hashiveinu****…*** *ke-kedem****): Ki*** *im maos ma'astanu*

*(*Return us O Hashem… restore our days as of old): **Rather***,* you have completely rejected us… (5:21-22)

The sense in our verse seems to support the meaning of *ki* as "indeed,” a sense of intensification of the message:

**Not only** do I reject and hate your festive gatherings, wherein the participants share the festive meat; **even if** you offer up burnt offerings which are completely consumed on the altar — I am still not interested.

An *ola* is an animal offering (cows, goats, sheep or birds) that is fully burned on the altar and is generally viewed as the prototypical "sacrifice.”

The first offering that our nation is commanded to bring (so to speak) is an *ola*; when Avraham is commanded to bring Yitzchak "as an *ola”[[4]](#footnote-4)* and then the ram, caught in the thicket, is the substitute *ola*.

A *mincha*, which means "tribute" and is used in profane settings as well (e.g. *Shoftim* 3:17), is also used regularly as a "twin" with an *ola* (*Bamidbar* 29:27, *Yehoshua* 22:23). The reason seems to be that the *korban mincha*, the grain-offering, which is presented in the Torah directly after the *ola* (Chapter 2 of *Vayikra*), is also seen as a non-participatory offering. The donor does not eat any of the grain — the officiating *kohanim* have that privilege — and in the case of a *mincha* donated by a *kohen*, it is completely burned up like an *ola*.

What is unusual about our phrase is that *ola* is presented without the genitive suffix, whereas the *mincha* is presented in this form, “*minchoteikhem*.” Paul[[5]](#footnote-5) suggests that this is an inverted case of the syntactical rule of “*mosheikh atzmo ve-acher imo,”* lit. "it pulls itself and another with it.” This rule is used to explain how a second item on a list is defined by the parameters of the first – but here, the **second** is defined as "your grain-offerings,” such that *ola* is understood as if it were to say *oloteikhem*, **your** *olot*.

I believe that this is an unnecessary reading of the text.

Even *olot*, which are brought as the regular communal offering, will not be attended to; nor if you as individuals offer up a (seemingly selfless) *mincha*, I will still not accept it.

The root *reish-tzadi-hei*, which in later biblical Hebrew (as well as rabbinic and modern Hebrew) means "desire,” has a related but different meaning in the earlier biblical idiom, specifically within the world of *korbanot*. As this word is used throughout *Vayikra* and in the earlier books of *Tanakh*, it means "accept" or "favor," implying a graceful acceptance by God of a person's offering. So far, we have seen two verbs associated with favorably accepting offerings, all of which God will **no longer** do: *ariach* (I will smell) and *ertzeh* (I will favorably accept).

*Ve-shelem meri'eikhem lo abit*

And I will no longer take notice of the peace offerings of your fattened beasts

The opening word *shelem* is a ***hapax legomenon*** (appears only once in the canon) as the singular of *shelamim*. What is odd about its placement here is the sequencing. As we explained above, the prophet is intensifying God's rejection of the *avoda*, that He hates and rejects not only their festive gatherings at which they partake "with God" (as it were); **even** their burnt offerings which are exclusively given to God, without their own partaking, are of no interest to Him. Why then conclude this two-verse diatribe against altar-worship with fattened beasts used as *shelamim*, returning to the feasts in which the people partake?

It seems that the key here is the word *meri*, fattened calf. The word *meri,* attested to in Akkadian from *maru* (to fatten up), appears eight times in *Tanakh*.

The four earliest citations appear in descriptions of great celebrations, where *meri* seems to define oxen: *shor u-mri* or *bakar u-mri*. The first of these is in David's festive parade, bringing the *Aron Ha-brit* to Yerushalayim (*II Shemuel* 6:13); the other three appear in Adoniyahu's short-sighted and ill-fated celebration of seizing the throne of his dying father, David (*I Melakhim* 1:9, 19, 25). Of the remaining mentions, two are of particular interest to us, ours and *Yeshayahu* 1, which we will look at in the third lecture in this mini-series; for now, we will address the pertinence of its usage here.

It would seem that Amos is addressing prevailing pagan attitudes among his audience as to the meaning of offerings and, not to put too fine of a point on it, the nature of God. As we will discuss in further detail in the final lecture on this section, in pagan thinking, the gods devour offerings; the fatter and richer the offering, the greater the pleasure of the gods. This mode of thinking is, of course, anathema to us, as we are zealous about our belief in a non-corporeal God for Whom offerings are a measure of the community (or individual) and its devotion. Still, there are numerous phrases in Torah which could be understood in the more primitive mode, e.g. “*Et korbani lachmi le-ishai*,” "My offering, My food for My offerings by fire" (*Bamidbar* 28:2).

Nonetheless, there are numerous passages which both confrontationally and incidentally correct this approach. The people of Shomeron (and Yehuda as well) retain much of this thinking throughout the period of the First Commonwealth, as is evidenced by much of Yirmeyahu's message. It is likely that the people think that if their communion with God includes an expensive fatted ox, this animal will be more pleasing to God. Hence, Amos concludes with the message of Divine rejection of that misaligned perspective.

**VERSE 23**

*Haser mei-alai hamon shirekha*

Remove from before me the noise of your songs

Music is an essential component of Temple-worship. The roots of music accompanying the offerings are in *Bamidbar* 10, where Moshe is commanded to fashion two cornets which will be blasted by the *kohanim* “*al oloteikhem ve-al zivchei shalmeikhem,”* “with your burnt-offerings and your slaughtered peace-offerings.”

Our understanding of the role of music in the *avoda* is expanded when we learn of the role of instruments in the experiences of the prophetic guild (*benei ha-nevi'im*) in *I Shemuel* 10; or of the time when Elisha has a harpist play for him to induce the prophetic spirit (*II Melakhim* 3). The Psalter is replete with mentions of musical instruments and their use in the Temple (e.g. *Tehillim* 92:2-3).

That the music will be pleasing before God is a given; but here, He insists that they remove it "from before Me.” The sweet sounds of worship have become just so much noise, thus the use of the odd *hamon*. This word, which later becomes "abundant,” seems to originally mean "noise" or "sound.”

When Avraham is promised (*Bereishit* 17:4) that he will become “*av hamon goyim,”* "the father of a multitude of nations," this refers to many people who, in their collective presence, produce much sound (nothing pejorative about it there). The noun *hamon* ends up taking the verb *ra'o,* e.g. in *II Shemuel* 18:19 (in Achima’atz's deliberately confused response to David, evading mention of Avshalom's death).

However, the sweet sound of the songs of worship have become just so much noise before God, and instead of His relishing the devotion, He wants nothing of it.

*Ve-zimrat nevalekha lo eshma*

For I will no longer listen to the melody of your harps

The parallel phrase is a part of God's rejection of the music-worship. As I did above, I take license with the phrasing and add "no longer;" this is the clear intent of Amos's words. Whereas, until now, God has been "pleased" to listen to the singing and playing, He now has no interest in hearing them — for reasons that we will discover in the next verse.

**AN OBSERVATION**

The rejection of the *avoda* here stands in parallel, as we will see later on, to Yeshayahu's rejection of the *avoda*. However, Yeshayahu is speaking in Yerushalayim and referencing the *avoda* in the Temple built by Shelomo, the Temple of which God approves and promises *(I Melakhim* 9:3): "My eyes and heart will be there forever.” We can understand why that worship was originally pleasing to God and why, with the moral turpitude and ethical backsliding which infects the leadership and priesthood in Yeshayahu's day, that worship is rejected.

However, Amos's words are aimed at the Shomeroni audience — whose worship of God has e'er been held at Beit El (and Dan); in other words, even before Achav introduces state-sponsored Baal-worship (about 100 years before Amos comes along), the worship of God is already in a "rejected" place (see *I Melakhim* 13:1-4).

What is it that is being rejected here? How can Amos's words line up so neatly (as we will see) with Yeshayahu's when the worship which is **now** being rejected was **never** accepted? Some food for thought…

In the next lecture, we will complete our analysis of the text of these seven verses.

**For Further Study:**

*Hamon*

Abraham Meir Habermann, “*Hamnu, Nitrabu—Po’al min Ha-shem Hamon,” Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World* 14:3 (38) (1969). [Heb.]

1. Note how Malakhi builds on this image in 1:2-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See *inter alii*, Rashi, *Iyov* 22:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See also *I Shemuel* 26:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Bereishit* 22:2; however, see Ralbag ad loc. for a different take on the phrase *“Ve-ha'alehu sham* ***le****-ola.”* [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Mikra Le-Yisrael*, p. 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)