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דפוס רפאל חיים הכהן בע"מ

# AMOS AND HOSEA – TWO DIRECTIONS IN ISRAEL'S PROPHECY

BY BINYAMIN UFFENHEIMER

## THE WORLD OF AMOS

It is our intention to prove that Amos and Hosea shaped two fundamental patterns in classical prophecy. Their differences are grounded first in their style and then in their ideology. The explanation for this variance is bound up in their character and in the scope of their activities, both historical and social alike. The activity of Amos encompassed the period of the Kingdom of Ephraim during the grandeur of Jeroboam, son of Joash, King of Israel (1:1) who succeeded in restoring “the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath unto the sea of Arabah” (II Kings 14:25). His words portray an unbridgeable gap between the powerful political and economic forces and the social structure of the Kingdom of Ephraim. As a result of the extensive conquest of Jeroboam there rose to power a small merchant class (2:6–8; 3:9–10; 8:4–6), military personnel and administrators (ch. 6). The extensive building projects of Omri and Ahab, in their time, attracted multitudes of farmers from the villages to Samaria and Jezreel. These found their livelihood in building construction and governmental administration. These projects were finished during the lengthy wars with Aram, and multitudes of workers were deprived of their livelihood. The wars did their share in impoverishing the village and reducing the status of the farmers. The crisis was especially felt in the border regions that suffered from the attacks of their enemies. Moreover, the majority of the Jewish inhabitants were driven out or were destroyed in the course of the battles as we learn from the Mesha inscription and from Amos' own words (1:3, 13). It appears that after the great victories the expellees were not returned to their homesteads. The despots of Ephraim and the rich merchants knew how to acquire these homesteads for themselves. They expropriated the peasants from their remaining economic position by means of the cruel exploitation of the institutions of justice, by

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exacting judgments against those who were entangled in debt, and also by outright fraud and extortion (3:9-10; 4:1; 5:12; 6:3; 8:4-6).

#### SOCIAL MOTIF OF AMOS' MESSAGE

Amos became the spokesman for the oppressed and the downtrodden. The social motif is the fundamental tone in his speeches since he attributes the prophetic calamities to social injustice. He elevates the moral-religious commandment to a superior religious value that functions as a special criterion in the evaluation of the society of his day. Incidentally, he uncovers the fraud and the falsehood of the ruling circles (4:4-5; 5:21-25) in their devotion only to cultic worship. The sin of the rulers of Ephraim that he condemns is of a clear class character that is entrenched in a haughty, brutal heart. Their overconfidence in their successes (4:1) made them dizzy. At first, he calls them to repent (4:6, 9-10, 12; 5:4-6, 14-15). When he failed, feelings of hatred began to develop (6:8). The threats of punishment turned into actualities and certainties (5:1-3, 11-13, 16-17, 26-27; 6:9-10, 11, 14). Then he portrays the image of the Day of the Lord as a day of complete vengeance in which all the forces of nature will conspire to punish the evil doers of Israel (5:18-20; 8:8-10; 9:1-4).

#### INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SITUATION OF NO CONCERN

The flaming words of punishment that he expresses are not the result of reflection on the international political situation as some would think. There is not a single sentence that mentions in any concrete form the foreign enemy that will execute the punishment. His words are phrased in general terms, undefined, insofar as he speaks of the enemy, war, captivity and the sword. Yet, there are prophecies in which the punishment is pictured as an outburst of the forces of nature, be they wild beasts like the lion (1:2; 3:4, 8; 5:19) bear or serpent (5:19-20; 9:3), or the earthquake (4:11; 8:8; 9:5), the solar eclipse (5:8, 20; 8:9) or drought, mildew, blight and pestilence (4:1-10). His words of retribution probably reflect his criticism of the society. Even the problem of the political orientation is none of his concern. He does not see the need to clarify the nature of the enemy that will arise against Israel. At any rate, the ascendancy of Assyria is still beyond his historical horizon and does not concern him.

As a native of Tekoa, in the wilderness of Judah, he excoriates with special vehemence the frivolous and extravagant life of the rich Shomronites who dwell

in luxurious palaces (3:9-10; 5:11; 6:11), surrounded by delightful vineyards, gardens and plantations of figs and olives (4:9; 5:11, 17). Though his prophetic activity took place in the Kingdom of Ephraim, yet his images and visions are immersed in the scenes of his childhood; for example, the region that borders between the cultivated area and the wasteland whose inhabitants supported themselves by sheep-herding (3:12) and by farming the poor rocky soil (3:12). The life of the farmer-shepherd in this region was conducted in the shadow of fear of wild animals such as lions, bears, and serpents (1:2; 3:4, 8; 5:18-19). He earned his livelihood with difficulty due to hunger (4:9), locusts (7:1-2), forest fires (7:4-5), lack of rain or, conversely, to excessive amount of rainfall and torrential streams (5:24). Fertile soil, rich produce and good harvests (9:13) were rare visions, so much so that Amos perceives them only in eschatological forms.

Generally speaking, his use of similes and metaphors are not numerous when compared to Hosea's. Amos makes an effort to free himself from the exclusive, associated control of the visual and the aural in order to attain the expression that represents the link between the various parts of speech. In the midst of his ascetic style he returns to the patterns of expression that captivated the listener with frequent and crowded repetitions. It is possible to designate this style as the monumental style because of its massiveness. It is found in the ancient Biblical epic, and Amos fashioned his prophetic utterances in accordance with this style.

His historical and religious utterances focus on an exceptional piece of literature in the world of the Bible. Herein he expresses abstract thoughts without having at hand objects that match them. The verbal expressions of systematic thought are the arrangement of concepts and terms, whereas the writers of the Bible expressed their thoughts concretely, that is in images and pictures. Therefore, Amos did not choose here the direct logical saying but rather the circumlocution, by combining images taken from various domains of life. These converge in the thought that unity and the inner continuity of the universe are an expression of the principle of causation hidden within it.

The first two sentences of chapter three are in the form of a warning directed against the children of Israel, not merely to the inhabitants of Ephraim, as it is written "against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt" (3:1). This saying is compounded of a hypothesis and a conclusion. The hypothesis is: "Only you have I know of all the families of the earth." The surprising conclusion is: "Therefore I will punish you for all your sins" (3:2).

## THE RELIGIOUS-ETHICAL AND THE SOCIAL-NATURAL

Perhaps, it is possible to sum up his thoughts as follows: There is an organic relation between the religious-ethical area on the one hand and the social-natural on the other. The law of causation governs both.

Man is equipped to discern the relation between cause and effect. Through the instrumentality of prophecy man can know the effects of his religious and ethical conduct. When he describes the compulsion placed upon the prophet by the simile of the lion's roar, Amos seeks to refute at once any denial of the authenticity of his words. He wishes to convey that the severe rebuke "therefore will I punish you for your sins" was the word of the Lord that was thrust upon him. Moreover, in this way he succeeded to explain the special position of Israel's relation to God.

## THE PERIOD OF HOSEA'S ACTIVITY

Hosea begins his activity where the rationalistic world of Amos ends. But first, let us clarify the problems of the time of this prophet. Whereas the superscription on the book of Amos is considered by research scholars as reliable, the title of the book of Hosea arouses many controversies. It is stated there that he prophesied "in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Kings of Judah and in the days of Jeroboam son of Josiah king of Israel" (1:1). According to II Kings 14:23, 15:1-2, Jeroboam died in the days of Uzziah. The other kings of Judah mentioned here reigned after that even and were contemporaries of Isaiah. Therefore some scholars say that the beginning of the title was added as a routine formula. The parallelism to Isaiah 1:1 and to Micah 1:1 brought our Sages to the hypothesis that Hosea was one of the four prophets (Pesachim 87a) who prophesied "in the same period" — Hosea, Isaiah, Amos and Micah.

## HOSEA AND HIS ENVIRONMENT

Even as the book of Amos portrays the period of prosperity of the reign of Jeroboam the words of Hosea reflect the perversions and the unrest that followed in its wake which brought Ephraim to the brink of destruction. Without a doubt the lack of balance in Hosea's style is partly attributable to the stormy days in which he lived and functioned. Indeed, The fundamental differential differences between these two prophets are grounded in their personal make-up and in their different characters. The massive, balanced style of Amos testifies to a stable and

strong personality that cuts through to objectivity and to clear verbal expression, freed from exclusive use of aural and visual association. On the other hand Hosea's style portrays an emotional short-tempered personality, drawn to colors and shadows and unable to concentrate on a single thought. He, however, is able to draw his ideas from his deep emotional feelings which Amos was unable to do despite his clear and sharp insights.

#### RICHNESS OF IMAGERY

In contrast to the few images and pictures with which Amos sketches the wilderness of Tekoa, we encounter in the book of Hosea a surprising richness of pictures, images and metaphors that glorify in clear lines the panorama of the mountains of Ephraim, the valleys of the north and the mountains of Galil. Amos mentions the following places: Ashdod, Shomron, Beth-El, Gilgal, Beer-Sheva, Dan, Lo-davar and Karnaim. The places mentioned in Hosea are more numerous, namely: Mitzpeh, Tabor, Gilead, Satim, Shechem, Shomron, Gibeah, Gilgal, Beth-El, Beth-aven. All these places and cities are within the boundary of the Kingdom of Ephraim. From this fact we learn with great plausibility that his origin and area of his activity were in the Kingdom of Ephraim. The panoramic descriptions and the economic background also dovetail beautifully into his imagery. He speaks at length about the growing of corn, wheat, wool, flax, wine, oil, grapes and figs. He mentions the following trees: oak, poplar, terebinth, ash, shade trees; the olive tree as a symbol of beauty; the tall trees of Lebanon symbolize strength and rootedness; the tall pine is a symbol of freshness; the lily is an example of beauty. He speaks of the wild animals, the birds of the sky, the dove, and the creeping things of the earth. He mentions the threshing floor and the wine press. He excels in the description of farm work: plowing, sowing, harrowing and harvesting. All these symbolize the people, its lot and its way of life. He describes the toil of the farmer, the eradication of wild growths, nettles, thorns etc.; the raising of sheep, oxen and dairy farming. He compares Israel, enslaved by the nations, to a cow harnessed to the plow upon which there is placed a yoke. He compares the education of the people by God to the work of the farmer who mounts the yoke upon the neck of the young calf that is only accustomed to thresh but now has to plow and harrow the field. Repeatedly he compares God's relationship to Israel to a farmer who lifts the yoke from the neck of the ox in order to feed it. Only one who is involved in agricultural work,

in the fruitful valley of the north, on the mountains of Ephraim or on the slopes of the Galil, can actually appreciate the world and its problems from this special viewpoint. It is superfluous to mention that Hosea, like the other writers of the Bible, speaks of the blessings of rain, dew, the east winds, the storms that rise up in the wilderness and dry up the vegetation, or the fear that the farmer has of wild animals, the lion, the leopard, the bear that invade the settled, habitable region during years of drought and hunger, wreaking havoc, destruction and desolation.

#### VIRTUOSITY OF ASSOCIATION

As mentioned previously, Hosea developed the principle of repetition that is impressed in the epic Israeli style and also in the ancient East to the point of virtuosity. This is in contrast to the massive style of Amos who creates the needed effect especially by way of monotonous literary patterns that constantly repeat themselves. The decisive factor in Hosea is his play on words. He employs a definitive root in various patterns, meanings and colors in his sequence of units of thought.

#### LACK OF BALANCED STYLE

Hosea's inclination to follow after tones, words, combinations and visions suits his impulsiveness that is recognizable in his sentence structure. The style of Amos is weighed, measured and balanced. He excels in inner evaluation as is found in all classical literature. Contrarily, Hosea at time swings to and fro because of his intense feelings until his speech stops abruptly so that his emotional announcements are truncated (4:17, 18; 5:14; 7:13; 8:1, 13; 9:7; 8:9, 14; 10:2, 4).

#### THE RELATIONSHIP TO TRADITION

In his inner personal freedom Hosea also leans on the ancient tradition. At times he exalts the motif of the stories of the Torah and assigns it an eschatological meaning. For example when he cites the wrestling of Jacob-Israel with "the man" (Genesis 32:25) — he emphasizes that Jacob wrestled with an "angel" or with "God" (Hosea 12:4-5). There are many references to the traditions in the Bible which he compares to his present day situation.

#### THE SIN

The point of departure of Hosea's reproof is his denunciation of idol worship

and the references to the Canaanite cult with its sex deviations. In the course of our investigation it becomes clear that the foreign idolatrous customs influenced the popular Hebrew worship of the Lord, especially in the large centers in the north. Thus the calves which Jeroboam, son of Nevat, introduced were just graven idols. The explicit condemnation of the pagan cult in Bethel and in Dan is in Hosea's interpretation the deterioration of Hebrew worship under the influence of Canaanitish idolatry into a syncretistic worship of idols.

Canaanite idolatry as such is also explicitly mentioned in 2:7-9, 15, 19. The Baalim are the paramours of Israel. The harlotry mentioned in this connection is cultish harlotry. In the future God will remove the names of the Baalim from her (Israel's) mouth and they shall no more be mentioned by name. indication that in his time the people turned to them. Truly, in 3:1 it is stated explicitly that they "turn to other gods". In 4:11-15 it is said:

*Harlotry, wine and new wine take away the heart.  
My people ask counsel at their stock,  
And their Staff declareth unto them;  
for the spirit of harlotry hath caused them to err,  
And they sacrifice upon the tops of the mountain,  
And burn incense upon the hills,  
Under oaks and poplars and terebinths,  
Because the shadow thereof is good;  
Therefore your daughters commit harlotry.  
And your daughters-in-law commit adultery.  
For they themselves consort with lewd women,  
And they sacrifice with harlots.*

Herein are mentioned various idolatrous customs: petitioning trees and sticks — the intention being to ask riddles near a holy tree, an ancient pagan Canaanite custom still preserved in such names as Elon-meonenim (Judges 9:37) and Elon-moreh (Genesis 12:6). The expression, "they sacrifice on the tops of the mountains and burn incense on the hills" is reminiscent of the descriptions of the Canaanite pagan harlotry in Jeremiah 2:20, 23. The real guilty ones were the leaders who served as bad examples to their daughters and who led astray the rest of the people who did not understand.

## THE CULT OF FERTILITY

The cult of fertility is also frequently mentioned in Hosea. Its conception and its birth are perceived in the mythological-magic existence. Therefore, by way of a "holy-marriage," man strengthens the powers of fertility in nature. The universe is perceived there as the result of the making of gods and goddesses. Therefore the terms idolatry and syncretism exist when we come to assess the phenomena which Hosea condemns. One is inclined to say that the multiplicity of erotic images with which Hosea describes the sin of the people is primarily the result of his observation of his environment. To this consideration add his disappointment in his faithless wife. More precisely: His understanding of the nation has shown him his personal lot in a symbolic mirror. His own unfortunate marriage served him as the symbol of the relation between God and His people. Herein the door is opened for the teaching of the redemption, for his great positive announcement for generations to come.

The sin of idolatry is the cardinal sin which Hosea condemns. It is not directed against any definite class of society because the nation as a whole was enmeshed in it. This sin left its mark in all areas of the national life. The pretentiousness of the ruling class, which was the main accusation of Amos, is not mentioned in the book of Hosea. For in his time this ambition was exposed in its superficiality and in its hollowness when the nobles of Ephraim sought aid and political support from the Great Powers . . . Hosea did not evaluate universal history as the area of his special concern. He was entirely engrossed in the inner problems of the Kingdom of Ephraim.

The grievous difficulty of the sin of idolatry becomes evident in the light of his logic concerning the history of Israel. Israel enjoyed the benefactions of God from its early youth on. The salvation from Egypt is not a lone event of God's action in the totality of events known to us from universal history, as Amos argues. Hosea emphasizes that the salvation was entirely an act of love of the Father-God who called His son, trained him, carried him in his arms, brought him out from the house of bondage and also watched over him by means of a prophet (12:11, 14). Similarly, He sent him prophets to fashion him and to instruct him (6:5). The disappointed love of His ungrateful son turned into burning anger. Hosea's identification with God's anger reaches the point where he is not satisfied with the mere knowledge of punishment but he prays for feelings of comfort (6:4, 11:8-11) and an emotional appeal that they return to

God (10:12, 14:2 etc.). In the whole book of Hosea one will not find even once the routine formula, "the word of the Lord" or "thus sayeth the Lord." Instead he indicates his complete identification with God's reaction through the frequent expression in the first person.

#### REPENTANCE AND REDEMPTION

In contrast to the demoralization of the standards which destroyed the life of the Kingdom of Ephraim, Hosea poses the demand for kindness, righteousness, truth, kindness, knowledge of God, justice and faith (4:1; 12:7). In the absence of these principles a people is lost (4:1-2). Kaufmann demonstrates that the formulation of this ideal came by way of the influence of the wisdom and psalmic literature of the Torah. In the ancient literature these demands were directed toward the individual, but Hosea turns them toward the nation and ascribes to them its destiny. Ideologically he agrees with Amos. Both of them elevated the implementation of the ethical ideals as the fundamental demand of God to His people. While Amos emphasizes the virtues of justice and righteousness (5:24), Hosea adds to them kindness, truth and knowledge of God. Kindness and truth are an ancient combination that surrounds the conduct beyond the line of strict justice, such as acts of friendship, deeds of kindness to the weak, to the persecuted or to the dead, etc.

The day of redemption is called here *the Day of Jezreel* (2:3) and the events of the day are spoken of in the prophecies that open up with words of judgement, *and it shall be on that day* (2:18). This formula is also found in Amos (9:11) as the opening description of the future day of redemption. Similarly we find in Hosea the motif of the ingathering of the exiles and the union of Judah and Israel in the kingdom of David (2:2, 3, 17). The newness of his eschatological vision is in the special development of the idea of repentance and its cosmic meaning. These ideas are expressed in style and motifs taken from the wisdom and psalmic literature of the Torah.

It seems the redemption from Egypt is but a rehearsal for the future redemption. Moreover, these motifs are interlaced and interwoven in a new fabric whose essence is the vision of an entirely new world. I might say that the redemption is not in the form of returning it to its former beauty but in the realization of a utopia of cosmic meaning. Therefore it is appropriate that he paid attention to the changes of the framework in which the traditional motifs

blossom. Thus the covenant between God and the people is not the same as in the days of the exodus from Egypt. Here the covenant with Israel includes also a covenant with all of nature — the wild animals, the birds of the air and the creeping things of the earth . . .

The ideal link between Israel and God will be in the form of an inner concentric circle that will encompass all of existence and create the cosmic harmony. Thus the dialogue will reach an intimacy that has no likeness in all creation . . .

In order to bring forth the intimacy of God's relationship to Israel, Hosea is drawn to the image of a betrothal — marriage known from his own personal experience, which he fitted into his general understanding of Israeli society:

And I will betroth thee unto Me forever,  
Yea, I will betroth thee unto Me in righteousness, and in justice,  
And in lovingkindness, and in compassion,  
And I will betroth thee unto Me in faithfulness;  
And thou shalt know the Lord. (2:21, 22).

Translated in an abridged form by S. Joshua Kohn.

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# THEMES IN THE BOOK OF ESTHER

BY NORMAN J. FREDMAN

The Book of Esther, the Megillah, is probably the most popular scroll in the Bible. "If all holidays would disappear, Purim would still remain," the Talmud exuberantly proclaims. As pure drama the Megillah may suffer a bit from the anti-climactic final three chapters in which, though the villain is dead, Jews still remain to be saved and a holiday to be proclaimed. But the Bible, it seems, is always willing to sacrifice drama for history, morality, and law. An examination of seven themes that appear in this small book may heighten our appreciation, both of its drama and its eternal message.

## THEME I: PROVIDENCE VERSUS CHANCE

The involved story that is rarely strained, always logical, in which every detail fits into a perfect puzzle, is not only the source of dramatic tension but the major moral of the Book. Coincidence does not exist. Chance is an illusion. Providence reigns.

If the King were not such a lustful sort, he would not have desired to display his wife. Had Vashti's refusal not infuriated the drunken King, he would not have so willingly grasped the advice of Memuchan, "that Vashti come no more before the King Ahasuerus" (1:19),\* a euphemism for her execution. Had Vashti not been so beautiful and the King anxious to prove his machismo, he would not have so readily acquiesced in the advice of the "youths" to choose a mistress from among all the virgins of the kingdom to replace Vashti.

The choice of Esther is also described as more than good luck. Instead of nagging the chief eunuch to fulfill her desires (2:13), she lets him choose whatever he wisely thinks proper (2:15). The favor she finds in his eyes may have affected his presenting her to the King on a wintry night in Tevet (December).

Had Esther revealed her Jewishness, it could not have been used later with such effectiveness. By revealing the plot on the King's life in Mordecai's name,

\* Unless otherwise identified, all quotes are from the Book of Esther.

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the King is placed in Mordecai's debt and eventually, in the words of the Braita (Avot 6:7), this credit to Mordecai "brings redemption to the world." Had the King immediately rewarded Mordecai for saving his life, he would not have needed to ask his chief advisor at such a crucial moment, "What shall be done to the man whom the King desires to honor?"

The Megillah introduces Haman with the words, "And it came to pass *after these things*," on which the Talmud comments, "The Holy One Blessed be He prepared the medicine before the disease." Before the introduction of Haman, we are informed of what will be the source of his eventual fall.

When the evil decree has been sealed and Esther convinced to risk her life to annul it, both the reader and the King are surprised by Esther's request that the King and Haman come to a party. For this she risks her life? Why not immediately ask the King to nullify his terrible decree?

To nullify the decree would require the removal (that is, the death) of Haman. Indeed, the eventual salvation of the Jews is justified by Esther on the ground that genocide was part of "the plot of Haman" (8:5). Esther could hardly ask the King directly for the head of his chief minister any more than Haman, at first, could ask the King for the life of an individual Jewish judge, Mordecai.

Both Esther and Haman await some sign which God (in Esther's belief) or luck (in Haman's belief) would reveal. Ironically, to Haman and his "lovers" the very invitation by Esther was proof that luck was now going his way. He prepares for his enemy a gallows visible throughout the city — even, as it turns out, from the palace window, and rises early to ask the King for Mordecai's life.

The Talmud (Megillah 15b) wonders not just about the party in general but specifically why Esther invited Haman. It lists no less than a dozen reasons. Rabbah stresses the point we have mentioned: it made Haman overconfident. "Pride goeth before the fall" (Proverbs 16:18). Other astute observations note that the King is fickle. Would he grant the request despite his grandiose offer of half the kingdom? Even if he granted the request, the King might change his mind before Haman is executed. Would Haman escape and with his huge wealth foster a rebellion. In a widely admired insight Rabbi Eliezer Hamodai suggests that Esther tried to foster the King and the Court's jealousy by treating Haman and the King as equals.

The sign that Esther awaits, the "miracle" of Purim, begins with a sleepless night. The Midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, 1056) comments: "No one slept that night;

Esther prepared her feast; Mordecai continued his fast; Haman built his gallows." The King would not sleep either. Again the hand of Providence is felt. The sleepless King asks to be read to. Rabbah suggests that jealousy and fear of a Haman-Esther plot made the King sleepless and that he searched through history of previous plots to find informants. In any case, the King comes through the night prepared to reward the forgotten Mordecai. In a scene that delights even adults, Haman, desiring to kill Mordecai, comes to meet a King supposedly desiring to reward him.

When Esther finally asks for her life, the King in his anger leaves the room. He returns to find Haman sprawled on Esther's bed begging for his life. The angry king misinterprets Haman's actions as an attempted rape. At this point Harbona speaks. We have heard his name but once before. He is one of those eunuchs who had been sent to bring Vashti and had thus begun the series of events that led to Esther's rise. Now he appears again to precipitate Haman's death and Mordecai's rise.

Then said Harbona, one of the eunuch's serving the King, 'Behold also, the gallows Haman has made for Mordecai, who spoke good for the King. It stands in the house of Haman fifty cubits high.' And the King said, 'Hang him on it!' (7:9)

The hand of Providence is ever felt but only once mentioned, and then deliberately the reference is underplayed, "And who knows, perhaps for a time such as this did you attain royalty" (4:14). Who knows? Every reader knows! As Jacob Felton showed in an article in *Dor le-Dor* (V:1, p. 33), he interprets the Biblical phrase, "Who knows" as referring to something the author either strongly believes in or wishes were so.

Contrasted to the hidden hand of Providence is the Persian belief in luck. The King consults astrologers (1:13) to decide the very life of his beloved "for so was the King's custom." To decide the day to end the life of an entire people, Haman throws dice. The day of destruction is auspicious: the thirteenth day of the last month. On leap years, Halacha quite naturally insists on the thirteenth month.

Nowhere does this contrast between divine destiny and chance, *Goral* (גורל) and *Pur* (פור), appear greater than in the attitudes of Mordecai and Haman to adversity. At the worst possible "time" (and that astrological word "time" – עת – is used twice in Mordecai's address), Mordecai remains confident in the eternity of Jewish existence. "For if you remain quiet at this time, then

relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place . . . and who knows, perhaps for a time such as this did you attain royalty" (4:14). Subtly Providence will save the Jews if possible; brazen miracle, if absolutely necessary. But the Jews will live!

Haman, on the contrary, sees himself as lost when, at the height of his power invited by the Queen for a private party, he is selected by the King as "his most noble prince" (see Targum to 7:9) to reward a man who has saved the King's life in a way Haman himself has proposed. His wise men and private astrologer note:

Since Mordecai is of Jewish origin, the fact that you have begun to fall before him is a sign that you shall not prevail against him. It is certain that you shall totally fall before him (6:13).

The root for fall, נפל, is one of several key theme words in the Megillah. Haman or one of his sorcerers has "cast" (the Hebrew literally means "cause to fall") lots. His wise men predict his fall. Haman indeed does fall on Esther's couch (7:8) and is suspected thereby of attempted rape. After Haman is executed, Esther falls at the feet of the King to beg for the life of her people. The word is again used to describe the fear of the Jews and Mordecai that falls on the non-Jews and Persian officials (8:17; 9:2, 3). It is finally mentioned the way it is first used to remind the reader of the holiday that began with cast lots.

It is not by chance, then, that the holiday is ironically named Purim. This is a major theme of the Megillah: the belief that beneath events lie not the whims of fortune, but the will of God. Every Purim is really *Goral*. Behind apparent chance is a divinely guided destiny.

#### THEME II: THE HIDDEN AND THE DISGUISED

"Where is Esther's name mentioned in the Pentateuch?" the Talmud asks, and answers, "אסתירה פני מהם אראה מה אחריתם" — (*Asteer*) — I will *hide* My face from them; I will see what their end shall be' (Deuteronomy 32:20). This is more than a clever pun in the spirit of Purim Torah. The hidden God and the disguised heroine are a major theme of the Megillah.

Alone of the Books of the Bible, the Megillah contains no mention of God's name. Though religious elements are mentioned explicitly, most notably in the fast and mourning when the evil decree is known and the proclamation of the holiday when the evil decree is averted, the constantly felt mighty hand of

Providence is never identified by name. Some traditional commentators feel that this is so because the Megillah was originally based on the letters of Purim (9:20, 30) that Mordecai sent to all the provinces proclaiming the Holiday. Some Bible critics wonder if the command to drink on Purim led to the elimination of the Divine Name from a Book, that might not be handled with utmost sobriety.

But perhaps those who consider the hidden Name a reflection of the hidden Presence are right. No longer could the Jew ascend to Jerusalem's temple to "see the Presence." The long Diaspora had begun. Providence was real, "great and feared," as the Men of the Great Assembly would proclaim again, but hidden. The first two chapters of Exodus describing the constantly increasing suffering of the Jews avoid any mention\* of God's name until the death of the old Pharaoh and the call of Moses. Unlike the Book of Judges which states that God delivered the Jews into the hands of their enemy, Exodus, describing the first Diaspora, is silent about the Ultimate Cause. So too does the Book of the Diaspora, the Megillah, remain silent. The sages sense only a hint. The invitation to Haman and the King, an invitation that brings the turn of fortune, is introduced with words whose initial letters spell out the name of God – יבא המלך והמן היום.

Explicitly hidden is Esther's Jewishness. "And Esther did not tell" that she was Jewish, both when she was initially taken and after she became queen. Ibn Ezra suggests (2:10) that she hid her identity to enable her to privately pursue Jewish observance, a behavior that history would identify with the name Marrano. After all, if the King too were not anti-Semitic, why does he so readily consent to genocide. Secrecy does not mean that Esther gives no hints about her origin. She retains her friendship with Mordecai the Jew and reports the plot of Bigthan and Teresh in his name.

Secrets eventually are revealed: the plots of the King's guards (2:23), the secret thoughts of Haman (6:6), the grandiose blood thirstiness of Haman (7:9), the Jewishness of Esther (7:4) and her relationship to Mordecai (8:1) and the mighty hand of God.

Appearance is the reverse side of hiddenness. It is not for nothing that the holiday is celebrated with masks and disguise. The gentile names of the Hero and Heroine have long since become identified with Jews, just like the names of English nobility (Sidney, Howard, etc.) adopted by Jews a generation or two ago.

\*One exception: the Egyptian midwives are called God-fearing for their refusal to murder.

The Talmud records the legend that Haman was once but a poor bathhouse keeper in Karcum, once befriended by Jews. (One is reminded of that poor postcard painter in Vienna, also befriended by Jews when down-and-out, who almost succeeded where Haman failed.) The point made is that only someone of so low a background would require the appearance, at least, of total mastery (3:2).

“What was the sin of the Jews of that generation?” students asked the sage Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai. They tried to assimilate, was his answer. “Since they wished to appear as non-Jews, so God appeared to be ready to destroy them.”

### THEME III: EVIL AS THE ACTING OUT OF FANTASY

“The wicked,” writes the Talmud, “are in the hands of their desires. The righteous have their desires in hand.” A major theme of the Book of Esther is the identification of evil with the acting out of fantasy. Despite the resemblance of Ahasuerus to the King the Greeks called Xerxes and despite the discovery by archeologists of a royal minister named Mordecai, the Megillah, because of these extreme behaviors, retains an air of the unreal. Ahasuerus first realizes the fantasy of eating, drinking, luxury and hedonistic revelry – gold and silver couches, costly apparel, an unbelievable half-year party with “wine according to the generosity of a king” (1:7). “No one is compelled” (1:8). Everyone – or at least every man – can do his thing. The second fantasy Ahasuerus acts out is the sexual one. A beautiful virgin, perfumed for a year, is brought to the lusty king every night or at least wherever desired.

While the King acts out his erotic dreams, Haman acts out his fantasies of power and violence. Everyone must bow and, when a Jew doesn't, well then, “destroy, slay, and annihilate all the Jews, young and old, infants and women, in one day” (3:13). That Ahasuerus agrees to let Haman act out this fantasy of violence, except when it interferes with his own erotic dreams (7:8), is the Biblical way of noting the common denominator between sins of Eros and sins of Thanatos – the acting out fantasy.

Very common to magical thinking is the wish-fulfilling ring. The Megillah may not contain a magic ring, but it does speak of a very powerful one. “Seal it with the King's ring. For writing which is written in the king's name and sealed with the King's ring, no man may reverse” (8:9). The ring that had been a source of death now becomes a source of life.

Even the King's safety is hedged in fantasy. The King justly fears assassination. After all, there had been a plot on his life by his own trusted guards (2:21-23). But to require a touch of the life-giving golden scepter is a magical ritual which Dr. Freud might easily explain.

Even the salvation of the Jews comes within the fantasy framework. The King offers Esther three wishes, "up to half of the kingdom." On the first wish, Esther asks for a party. How childlike! On the second wish, Esther asks for another party. Only for the third wish does reality intrude, to the displeasure of the King. Esther asks for her life.

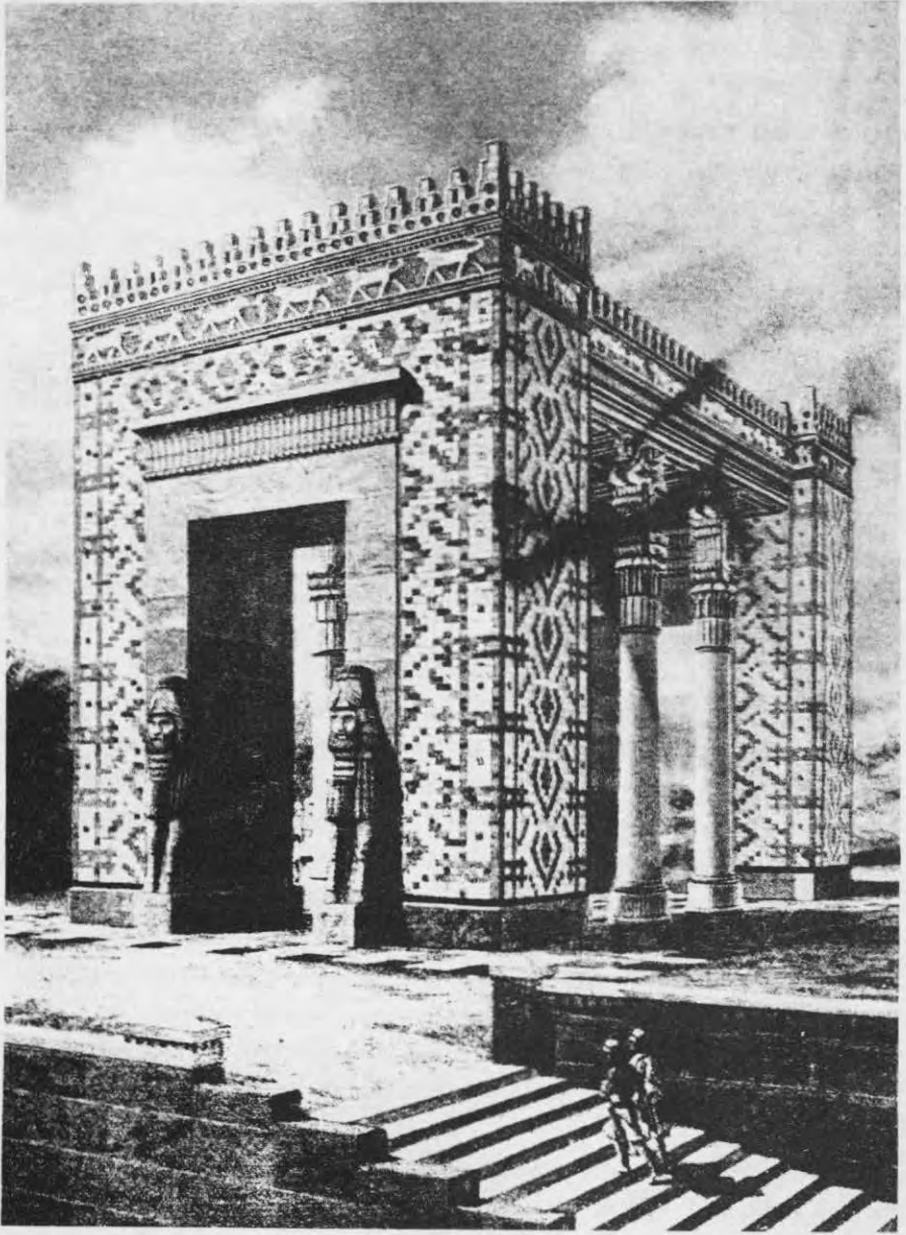
The phrase, "if it please the King," is used seven times in the Megillah. The first time (1:19), Memuchan asks if the king would be pleased to get rid of Vashti. The second time (3:9), Haman asks if it would please the King to destroy the Jews. The third and fourth times (5:4, 8) are the "trivial" requests, to come to Esther's party. The fifth (7:3) and sixth times (8:5), Esther asks for her own life and the life of her people. The seventh and final time (9:13), Esther asks the King for the right to prolong the battle of Shushan. "If it please the King" includes life and death – plus a good swig of wine in between.

#### THEME IV: THE TRIUMPH OF THE DOWNTRODDEN

The very presence of the last three chapters, so anticlimactic after the death of the villain Haman, points out that Haman is not as much the enemy as is *מחשבת המן*, Haman's design for genocide. Rabbi Eleazar remarked that when Esther answered the King's question ("Who has the audacity to try to murder the Queen and her people"), she pointed to Ahasuerus himself, but an angel came and pushed her finger towards Haman (Megillah 16a). Only a shallow reading of the text can shift all the blame from Ahasuerus to his evil minister. With justification can we attribute the King's sudden philo-Semitism "not to the love of Mordecai, but to the hate of Haman." Just as Pharaoh's butler forgot the brilliance of the "Jew-boy slave," so did the King forget the help of the "Jew-judge" until it served his purpose.

Twice (2:1; 7:10) the Megillah informs us, "the King's wrath was assuaged": the first time, after he killed Vashti; the second time, after he killed Haman. As the death of Vashti leads to the rise of Esther, so does the death of Haman lead to the rise of Mordecai.

But there may be another reason for comparing the King's reaction to the



*A Reconstruction of the Palace of Ahasuerus*

deaths of Vashti and Haman. The Jew may be the most threatened group in the Megillah, but women also are unreasonably downtrodden. Chapter 1 describes women as victim, ordered to satisfy a husband's will, to treat him as master, even to speak her husband's language. Chapter 2 describes women as sex objects, subject to the whim and fantasy of the lascivious King. But by the end of the Megillah, the tables have turned. Though Mordecai is second to the King, it is Esther who gains the right of Jewish self-defense, the right to hang Haman's sons, who becomes fabulously wealthy with Haman's estate, and who, together with Mordecai, decrees the holiday observance. The lot of woman has changed from helpless pawn to de facto master of the realm.

Mordecai's lot changes in less than one day (5:14; 6:2; 8:1) from probable victim to second to the King so that instead of being raised on the gallows he is raised to greatness. The day of his doom becomes the day of his promotion and the fear of Mordecai falls upon the princes and satraps (9:3).

The change in the lot of the Jew is equally spectacular. It too is associated with one particular day, though they have almost nine months to prepare for it. From a pariah people they become the people that "all the princes, satraps, governors and they that did the King's business helped" (9:3). To match the glory and fear of Mordecai, is the glory and fear of the Jews:

And wherever the King's command and decree reached the Jews had gladness and joy, a feast and a good day. And many from among the peoples of the land became Jews, for the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them (8:17).

#### THEME V: IRONY AND REVERSED ROLE

The change of destiny for women and Jews in general and for Mordecai in particular is part of the more inclusive theme of reversed role (9:1). Salvation is not enough. In a word play, as subtle in Hebrew as it is in English, when Haman makes himself a gallows (6:4), it is truly for himself — לחלות את מרדכי . . . בהמן בא — על העץ אשר הכין לו — It is not enough that Haman die. He dies on the gallows he has prepared. It is not enough that the supporters of Haman are killed. They are killed on the very day they plotted to murder the Jews; "the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to have rule over them was turned to the contrary. The Jews ruled over them that hated them" (9:1).

Clothes may not make the man, but they certainly describe Mordecai's position. When informed of the fate of the Jews, Mordecai, to the disgust of

Esther, rips his clothes and puts on sackcloth and ashes. The Megillah emphasizes his refusal to accept Esther's gift of clothing through "Hatach, one of the King's eunuchs," if only to point out his later acceptance of the King's own apparel sent by Ahasuerus through "one of the King's most noble princes," Haman (7:8-11). The nobody, Hathach's name, is mentioned, precisely to contrast him with the somebody, Haman. If Mordecai's sackcloth and ashes signal the evil decree, then the change in decree is signaled by his wearing "royal apparel of blue and white, with a great crown of gold and with a robe of fine linen and purple" (8:5).

The ring that sealed the fate of the Jews is now used to seal the fate of their enemies, and the handing over of the fateful ring, first to Haman and then to Mordecai, symbolizes the transition.

The decree to destroy the Jews (3:12-15) and the superseding decree to destroy the anti-Semites (8:9-14) use virtually the same language. Subtle differences can be noted though. Haman's verbs are all passive, Mordecai's verbs are all active. Haman's decree "was written and was sealed (3:12). Mordecai "writes . . . and seals" (8:10). Haman's postal runners may have "gone forth in haste" (3:15). Mordecai's postal service "rode on swift steeds and pressed on in haste" (8:10). Both decrees (3:13; 8:11) gave the right to take booty, but the Jews specifically "lay no hand on the spoil" (9:10), possibly treating it like forbidden Amalekite property or perhaps leaving it for the King in order to compensate him for the lost bribe of Haman's.

Where once "there was great mourning among the Jews and fasting and weeping and wailing, while many lay in sackcloth and ashes" (4:3), now "the Jews had light and gladness, joy and honor" (8:16). Where once "the city of Shushan was perplexed" (3:13), now "the city of Shushan shouted with joy" (8:15).

The turning point is actually the moment of greatest irony. Haman, thinking the King wished to honor him suggests that "the man the King desires to honor" should be treated like a king for the day, only to discover that this man is really his arch-enemy, Mordecai, whose death Haman had come to request.

The same scene that had taken place the night before the fateful ride, when Zeresh and Haman's "lovers" advised to build the gallows is repeated. Only this time Haman's "wise men" (his "lovers" have grown sadly wiser) predict his downfall.

The double feast also serves for contrast. After the first feast, Haman is apparently at the summit of this influence, save for the stubbornness of Mordecai. After the second feast, he is suffering the fate he had planned for Mordecai. Echoes from the first feast appear in the second. In both, the King asks Esther what she wishes and offers her half his kingdom. After the first feast it is Haman who uses the phrase, "All this (honor from King and Queen) equals – וְשׁוֹ – nothing to me so long as I see Mordecai..." (5:13). At the second feast it is Esther who uses the phrase, "This calamity\* (of slavery) is not equal to the damage caused the King" (7:4). Death is the unequalled to Haman; life is the unequalled to Esther.

#### THEME VI: HISTORY RELIVED

The story of Esther and Haman can be viewed as continuing Saul's fight with the Amalekite, the fight that lost him his kingdom (I Samuel 15). Saul had let the arch-villain, Agag, live and had taken Amalekite booty. Now the Agagite, Haman, purchases the life of the Jews including that of Esther, descendant of Kish (Saul's father is also named Kish). The House of Saul is royal once more. If she avoids her responsibility, it is not only Esther who is lost, but "her father's house" (4:14), even though "relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place."

Maimonides describes true repentance as changed behavior when the situation repeats itself. The command to destroy Amalek, this time revealed as the command to live and save the Jews, is given again to the House of Saul. Esther's destruction of Haman and the salvation of the Jews is necessary to save "her father's house." Perhaps the second day's battle in Shushan, the leading city, redeems Saul's laxness on his second day with the captured Agag (I Samuel 15:12). And this time the Jews do not touch Agagite booty.

The famous line of Santayana, "He who does not learn from history is condemned to relive it," has a ritual parallel: he who cannot relive history will not learn from it. The holiday of Purim is an effort to learn by reliving. Required in its celebration are Torah readings about Amalek, the reading of the Megillah, the feast and drinking, dainties to friends, and donations to the poor. Prohibited are mourning and fasting.

\* See Ibn Ezra on 7:4

The readings from Exodus, Deuteronomy and Samuel about Amalek raise the holiday from history to mitzvah. One essential Talmudical concern is, how could the holiday of Purim be proclaimed when there is a Biblical prohibition against adding to Divine Commandments. The answer is, to see Purim as part of the command to destroy Amalek.

The Megillah is read both day and night to repeat the key message of the holiday. Rabbi Joshua ben Levi sees in Psalm 22 a prophecy of David's concerning all exiles, but especially the bitter trial of Esther (Persian for *Dawn Star*):

For the Leader; concerning the *Dawn Star*. A Psalm of David.

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,

And are far from helping me at the words of my cry?

O my God, I *call by day*, but You do not answer;

And *at night* there is no silence for me.

We too must "call (also the Hebrew used for reading Scriptures aloud) by day and at night."

The feast of Purim, like those of Esther, takes place in the late afternoon. A key feature of all Biblical holidays is Kiddush, a benediction over wine. Halachic Purim has no Kiddush but it does have the famous Adloyada, the permission to get drunk. Since no book of the Bible mentions drinking to the extent of the Megillah (the word for a drinking bout – משתה – euphemistically translated "feast," occurs twenty times in the Megillah), and drunkenness is a minor theme of the book, if not of the name Purim itself (which may be the plural for "pura" – פורא – winepress), drinking is not for the joy of sanctification, but for the joy of history relived.

The unity of tragic destiny has been replaced by the unity of hospitality to friends and generosity to poor. Like the gift of dainties to Esther (2:9) that heralded her grace in the eyes of all who saw her and eventually her King, so the dainties we send our friends repeat this celebration of grace and promise, the favor of the Divine King. So important is the requirement of generosity to the poor that Purim is scheduled never to occur on the Sabbath so as not to deprive them of their gifts.

The mourning and fasting that characterized the Jews when Haman's evil decree became known is limited to the Fast before Purim and is forbidden on the day that celebrates the turn from "mourning to holiday."

The Talmud explicitly gives the reason for celebrating Purim on the 15th of Adar in walled cities like Jerusalem: so that they may be "like Shushan" (Megillah 2b).

Even some customs of more recent origin like the Hassidic "Purim Rav" or the wearing of masks recall the Megillah's theme of disguise. Jews who pretend to be less than Jews and God who pretends to be less than Almighty.

#### THEME VII: SIN AND REPENTANCE

To these more obvious themes, the Talmud adds Sin and Repentance. The sin, Rabbi Simeon bar Yochi senses, is half hearted surrender of one's Jewishness. Does he see this in the punishment itself or in Mordecai's denunciation of Esther in being more concerned with her family's reputation than in her family's duty? Does he see this in the prophet Ezekiel's denunciation of those exiles who said, "We shall be as the nations":

'As I live,' saith the Lord God, 'surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with fury poured forth will I be King over you' (Ezekiel 20:33).

It is Haman whom the Megillah calls "full of fury" (3:5; 5:9). The sages would thus have us see the Kingship of the Hidden God not only in the "mighty hand" of Providence but in the "fury poured forth." It is Amalek that "chanced to meet you by the road" (Deuteronomy 25:18) who reveals "the fury of chance" (Leviticus 26:28).

The repentance of the Jews is more explicit. The fasting and sackcloth were outer signs of a turn to Israel's only ally. "The Jews established and made it part of tradition" (9:27) is interpreted by the Talmud as, "The Jews established that which had been their tradition." They accepted in gratitude what they had once accepted in awe. Purim is viewed as a second Sinai. Once Israel had cried, "We shall do and we shall understand." On Purim they understood.



# PSALM XV — A LITURGICAL OR ETHICAL PSALM

BY YIZCHAK AVISHUR

A Psalm of David

Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle?  
Who shall dwell upon Thy holy mountain?  
He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness,  
And speaketh truth in his heart;  
That hath no slander upon his tongue,  
Nor doeth evil to his fellow,  
Nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour;  
In whose eyes a vile person is despised,  
But he honoureth them that fear the Lord;  
He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not;  
He that putteth not out his money on interest,  
Nor taketh a bribe against the innocent.  
He that doeth these things shall never be moved.

Psalm 15

Generally, Psalm 15 has been regarded for its ethical content, while little attention has been given to its structure and form. Much light can be added to the meaning of the psalm when the latter are given their due part in the formation of the psalm.

## STRUCTURE OF THE PSALM

Three distinct parts emerge from the psalm: The question that opens the psalm (v. 1), the answer which constitutes its essence (v. 2-5a) and the promise which concludes it (5b).

## THE OPENING QUESTION (v. 1)

*Lord, who shall sojourn in Thy tabernacle?  
Who shall dwell upon Thy holy mountain?*

Interpretations have varied on the purpose of the question posed. Some take it

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literally, as a dramatic opening to a ritual accompanying pilgrims at the Temple. They derive this from the parallelism of the verbs — “sojourn” and “dwell” — and of the nouns — “tabernacle” and “holy mountain.”

It is more likely an old expression of the question: Who is worthy of being counted among the intimates of God? The root word of “sojourn” — גור — implies more than mere dwelling. It refers as well to the protection received by the sojourner. The “tabernacle” and “holy mountain” contain a metaphoric meaning; i.e., the places where the Divine Presence — שכינה — may be found. Besides, there is no mention in the entire psalm, after the introduction, of ritual or temple as we find in many other psalms.

From these considerations it is reasonable to assume that the opening verse is probably a well-known formula, which introduces the question: who is worthy of dwelling in the *protection* of the Almighty?

#### THE ANSWER (v. 2–5a)

The composition of the answer is structured on an interplay of positive and negative strictures in alternate verses, as if to say: Do this and stay away from that. Walk uprightly (v. 2) and do no evil to your fellow man (v. 3); he honors them that fear the Lord (v. 4) and takes no bribe against the innocent (v. 5).

It is as though the poet deliberately built up a tension wire tying in the positive and negative poles of correct conduct: Verse 2 — positive; verse 3 — negative, in the sense of doing the good by refraining from doing the bad. The same with verse 4 — positive; verse 5 — negative.

From the analysis of the verbs in the answer, it is worth noting that the present tense is consistently used in the “positive” verses while the past tense is employed in the “negative” verses: דובר, פועל, הולך, in verse 2; לא רגל, לא עשה, לא נשא in verse 3; נשבע, נמאס, יקבד, in verse 4; לא לקח, לא נתן, in verse 5.

It seems that the poet is not just throwing out general didactic advice. He is thinking of a real person, in a setting of a society experienced by him. He knows that person as he sees him walking the path of righteousness (positive verses and present tense) in his everyday conduct. He has also observed him in his past behavior. He was never (negative verses and past tense) guilty of improper action toward his fellowman.

It is interesting to note how the poet involves every fiber of the physical man in performing his good deeds and in abstaining from the bad: He *walketh* uprightly

(v. 2), he *speaketh* truth (v. 2), a vile person is despised in his *eyes* (v. 4), he *takes* no bribe (v. 5).

#### THE PROMISE (v. 5b)

*He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*

What is the connection of the conclusion of the psalm with its introduction? Apparently none.

Some commentators refer to this verse as an addendum to the introduction. Who will sojourn on God's holy mountain? He who walks uprightly and shuns evil. But not only will he dwell in God's tabernacle but he will never be moved from there.

As we understood the meaning of the introduction, i.e. who is worthy of dwelling in the *protection* of the Almighty, the conclusion has a direct relationship to it. He that doeth these things will never be moved, for, as he seeks God's nearness and protection, he will dwell on His holy mountain — שׁוֹיַחֵ ה' לְנִגְדֵי חַמִּיד — כִּי מִיְמִינִי בִל אִמּוֹט. *I have set the Lord always before me; surely, he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.*

#### SIGNIFICANCE OF PSALM 15

Rav Simlai, when preaching, said: Six hundred and thirteen precepts were communicated to Moses, three hundred and sixty five negative precepts, corresponding to the number of the solar days in the year, and two hundred and forty eight positive precepts, corresponding to the number of the members of man's body. Said Rav Hamnuna: David came and reduced them to eleven principles, as it is written, *A Psalm of David, who shall sojourn in Thy Tabernacle . . .* (Tractate Makkoth 23b-24a).

It is written in conclusion: He that doeth these things shall never be moved. Whenever Rabban Gamaliel came to this passage, he used to weep, saying: Only one who practised all these shall not be moved, but anyone falling short in any of these virtues would be moved. Said his colleagues to him: Is it written 'He that doeth *all* these things shall not fall?' It reads, 'He that doeth *these* things,' meaning even if only he practises one of these things he shall not be moved (Tractate Makkoth 24a).

On the opening verse of Psalm 15, Rashi, the commentator, remarks: "This psalm marks the virtues of piety."

## TEN OR ELEVEN PRECEPTS

How many precepts does Psalm 15 contain? Rabbi Simlai, a Talmudic sage, counted eleven, while others saw in this psalm a parallel of the Ten Commandments, if not in content, at least in form and style. The latter view it as a moral decalogue to instruct man in ethical living, thus limiting its moral principles to ten.

The tradition follows Rabbi Simlai's count. It is interesting, however, to note that this psalm, discovered among the scrolls of the Qumran Caves, actually contains only ten precepts; the phrase – ולא רגל על לשונו – “that hath no slander upon his tongue,” is missing. The omission of this phrase in the Dead Sea Scroll is explained by some scholars in that the principles appear in pairs, one opposite the other, so that this phrase would have broken the symmetry. It is more probable that this precept was not sufficiently clear in its meaning, and was thus dropped from the psalm; or is it possible that the psalm originally contained only ten precepts, as in the Qumran Scrolls, but that this phrase was added at some point and remained so, as in our Masoretic text? At any rate, it is quite evident that this specific phrase is discussed by the commentators in greater elaboration than the others in the psalm, because of the difficulties of interpretation.

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## THE CATHEXIS OF ISRAEL TO EGYPT

BY LOUIS KATZOFF

No nation played as prominent a role in its relationship to ancient Israel as did Egypt. Even a cursory comparison of the listing of Egypt and other nations of the Biblical period in Mandelkern's Concordance of the Bible will verify the wide gap between the land of the Nile and any runnerup in the number of times mentioned in the Tenakh.

But more than the quantitative instances of inter-relationship of Egypt and Israel, does the qualitative effect of Egypt upon Israel arouse one's curiosity. Many of the ordinances of the Pentateuch are linked with either Israel's sojourn in Egypt or the exodus from it, even though many of these Mitzvot have little or no connection with these historical experiences. A striking example of this discontinuity is the declaration to be recited by the Israelite as he brings his first fruits – **ביכורים** – to the Sanctuary after settling the Land of Canaan:

And it shall be, when thou art come in unto the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee for an inheritance that thou shalt take of the first of all the fruit of the ground . . . and thou shalt put it in a basket and shalt go unto the place which the Lord thy God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there.

And thou shalt come unto the Kohen that shall be in those days, and say unto him: 'I profess this day unto the Lord thy God, that I am come unto the land which the Lord swore unto our fathers to give us . . .'

And thou shalt speak and say before the Lord thy God: 'A wandering Aramean was my father, and he went down into Egypt, and sojourned there, few in number; and he became there a nation, great, mighty, and populous. And the Egyptians dealt ill with us, and afflicted us. . . . And the Lord brought us forth out of Egypt. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

What is the connection of the ritual of Bikkurim with Israel's experience in Egypt? It would seem more logical that the ceremony would contain an

1. Verses 5 through 8 are the basis of an elaborate Midrashic comment which was incorporated into the Haggadah and read at the Pesach Seder table.

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expression of thankfulness for entering the Promised Land or for its agricultural bounty enabling the bringing of the first fruits in gratitude. Instead, the ritual demands only an acknowledgment of entry into the land and a recitation of Israel's sojourn in and redemption from Egypt.

Similarly, there are additional rituals commanded by the Torah containing references to the Exodus with no apparent congruence.<sup>2</sup>

The connection of Israel with Egypt is even more pronounced in the Siddur. A startling question can be posed at this point. If we were to compare the significance of the Revelation at Mount Sinai – מעמד הר סיני – and of the Exodus – יציאת מצרים, would anyone question the primacy of the former? Then, how is it that the Siddur, which is the repository of the deepest sentiments of the Jewish people, contains no prayer directly related to the Ten Commandments<sup>3</sup> or to the experience of Revelation, but it does include many references to the Exodus.<sup>4</sup> What might be some reasons for Israel's cathexis to Egypt?

#### A PSYCHOLOGICAL REASON

An immediate but superficial reason can be adduced from psychological speculation. The first experience in the birth of a nation leaves the profoundest impact upon posterity. For example, how would we compare the celebration of the bicentennial of the United States by its citizens with the observance of the bicentennial of the adoption of the Constitution, to be celebrated a bit more than a decade from today. Though the Constitution is the foundation of the entire

2. פרשת ציצית – Numbers 15:41. However, פרשת חטילין – Exodus 13:9 and Exodus 13:16; פרשת ציצית – Numbers 15:41. However, the redemption of the first born and the eating of Matzah on Pesach (Exodus 13:1–8) relate clearly to מכת בכורות of the Ten Plagues and to the יציאת מצרים.

3. Two oblique references to Sinai are really related only to the Sabbath:

a) ישמח משה במתנת חלקו... בעמדו לפניך על הר סיני ושני לוחות אבנים הוריד בידו וכחוב בהם שמירת שבת.

b) חכנת שבת רצית קרבנותיה... אז מסיני נצטוו עליה ותצונו ה' אלקנו להקריב בה קרבן מוסף שבת כראוי.

4. For example in the שחרית service:

a) וזרות עמו הברית... ותרא את עני אבותינו במצרים ואת זעקתם שמעת על ים סוף... אז ישיר משה.

b) ויאמר ה' אל משה לאמר, דבר אל בני ישראל ואמרת אליהם ועשו להם ציצת... אני ה' אלקיכם אשר הוצאתי אתכם מארץ מצרים.

c) עזרת אבותינו אתה הוא מעולם... ממצרים גאלתנו ה' ומבית עבדים פדיתנו

system of law for the American people, it may be assumed that its bicentennial celebration will not receive the elaborate attention given to the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Another example might be a comparison between Israel's Independence Day – יום העצמאות – and the anniversary of the 1967 unification of the city of Jerusalem – יום ירושלים. After twenty centuries of praying for the return to Zion and to the sacred site of the ancient Temple – ותחזינה עינינו בשוכך לציון – ברחמים – it would seem that, having made the Western Wall – הכותל – our own, the Day of Jerusalem – כ"ח אייר – would take precedence over the celebration of an event that took place only three decades ago. But this cannot be. Yom Ha-atzmaut is and will remain a national holiday while Yom Yerushalayim will at most remain a local religious observance. The psychological reality of the first experience as a nation cannot be gainsaid.

The formation of the people of Israel as a corporate entity through their redemption from slavery in Egypt left its indelible mark and carries more affective meaning than any other national experience.

#### DO NOT SWAGGER

An interesting insight into the historic personality of the Jew can be gained from his self-image, in contrast to the self-image of other ancient peoples. The one common denominator of all ancient monarchs was their boastful claims of conquest. Many steles attest to real and imagined victories containing exaggerated accounts of military exploits of the kings whose self-aggrandizement infiltrate their inscriptions.<sup>5</sup>

Not so in Israel's account of its origin. "A wandering Aramean was my father" (Deuteronomy 26:51). "We were slaves in the land of Egypt" (opening statement in response to the Four Questions in the Haggadah). Israel's beginnings were humble and reflected none of the haughtiness of other ancient peoples.

5. About 1220 BCE, King Marniptah of Egypt led his troops on a campaign to quell some uprisings in Canaan. On his return, he erected a monument and enumerated the cities and the peoples he plundered (Israel is mentioned for the first time by a non-Biblical source). Soon after his "conquest" Egyptian domination of Canaan evaporated.

From this self image the Jew derived two lessons: arrogance is to be eschewed, while God's part in his redemption is always recalled. Moses warns the Children of Israel against arrogating to themselves the glories of their successes:

Then thy heart be lifted up and thou forget the Lord thy God, who brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage . . . and thou say in thy heart: 'My power and the might of my hand hath gotten me this wealth.' But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth; that he may establish his covenant which He swore unto thy fathers, as it is this day.

Deuteronomy 8:14, 17-18

This acknowledgment of God's part in Israel's deliverance is echoed as well in the passage of the Haggadah: "And if the Almighty had not taken our ancestors forth from Egypt, we and our children and children's children would still be slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt."

#### DISCOVERING THE IDEA OF HUMANITY

The deepest meaning of Israel's sojourn in Egypt was caught by the very experience of slavery. Many peoples suffered under bondage, but Israel's unique genius was to learn the lesson of humaneness from such experience. Many of the ethical precepts in the Torah contain, as it were, a causal consideration: *for ye were slaves in the land of Egypt* or *ye were strangers in the land of Egypt*:

Thou shalt not pervert the justice due to the stranger or to the fatherless, nor take the widow's raiment to pledge; but thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in Egypt and the Lord, thy God, redeemed thee thence; therefore, I command thee to do this thing.

Deuteronomy 24:17-18

When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it after thee; it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondsman in the land of Egypt; therefore I command thee to do this thing.<sup>6</sup>

Deuteronomy 24:20-22

6. It is interesting to note that in the previous law about justice to the stranger, orphan and widow, the cause is given in the fact of redemption from Egyptian slavery – *ויפדך ה' אלקיך משם* –

Protection of the resident alien is secured by astonishingly humane laws set down by the Torah because of the expressed reason of having once been strangers themselves in Egypt:

And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not do him wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, *and thou shalt love him as thyself*, for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.<sup>7</sup>

Leviticus 19:33-34

The most telling connection between the actual experience of subjection and the laws of justice is seen in the following injunction:

And a stranger shalt thou not oppress, *for ye know the heart of a stranger*, seeing ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Exodus 23:9

"The alien was to be protected," comments the philosopher Hermann Cohen, "although he was not a member of one's family, clan, religious community or people; simply *because he was a human being*. In the alien, therefore, man discovered the idea of humanity."

#### DO NOT ABHOR AN EGYPTIAN

Oppressors who subject others into bondage are not remembered kindly by the victims or by their descendants. Yet, in the case of Egypt, Israel is bidden not to hate the Egyptian: *Thou shalt not abhor an Egyptian because thou wast a stranger in his land* (Deuteronomy 23:8). Though oppressed, Israel had found a home in Egypt, and for this the Egyptians are to be remembered with a grain of gratitude.

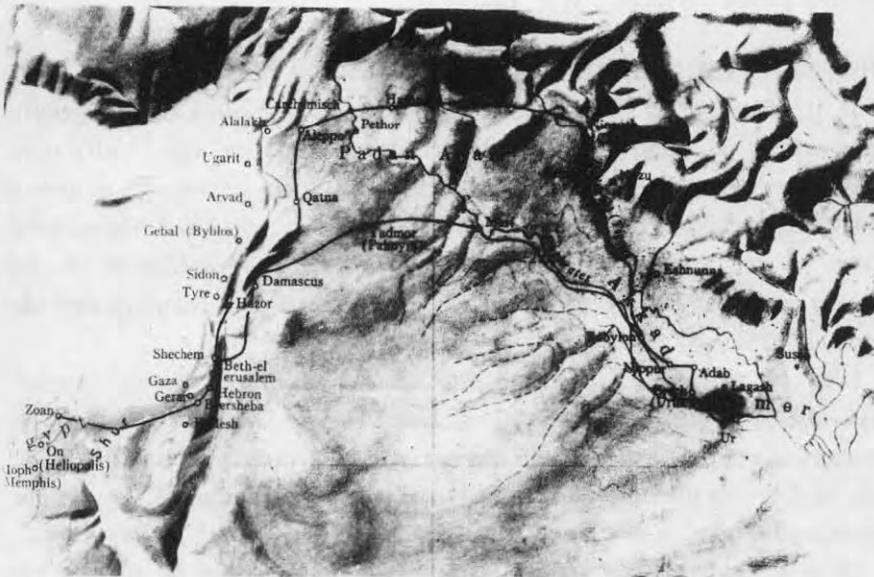
From the prophetic books of the Bible come many a denunciation of Egypt. Yet, in the Messianic age, the relationship of Egypt and Israel will take on a gloriously positive reality:

while in this law of generosity to the landless, there is no mention of redemption, the reason given simply in the very experience of slavery.

7. *I am the Lord your God* is mentioned often in the ethical injunctions of Chapter 19 of Leviticus. Rashi points out the reason for this: Since motives are not visible, one may take these laws lightly. However, the Almighty knows the heart of man and will judge him accordingly.

In that day there shall be five cities (a round figure signifying an indefinite number) in the Land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan (i.e. Hebrew) and will swear (allegiance) to the Lord of hosts. In that day shall there be an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt (a monumental symbol of the recognition of the sovereignty of God). . . . And the Lord shall make Himself known to Egypt and the Egyptians shall know the Lord. . . . In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria (through the Land of Israel connecting Assyria in the north with Egypt in the south with unrestricted commerce flowing from one to the other). . . . In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria (a triple alliance for peaceful relations), a blessing in the midst of the earth, for that the Lord of hosts hath blessed him saying: 'Blessed be Egypt My people and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel Mine inheritance.'

Isaiah 19:18-25



*In that day shall there be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria*

# DAVID AND BATHSHEBA

BY MOSHE GARSIEL

## Part III

### THE NARRATOR'S MORAL AIM

Our analysis of the Bathsheba episode which makes use of historical background material reveals a much more complex portrayal of the incident than one could derive from a simple reading of the information supplied by the narrator. Also, we can discover the narrator's purpose in relating this story only after we relate the material in the eleventh chapter of II Samuel with the following chapter and the events that occurred in the later years of David's reign.

The moral aspects of the tale are brought out in a series of movements between two opposite poles. On the one hand, there is a progressive demoralization resulting from the initial sin. On the other, one can behold the tremendous effect of even partial repentance (Ch. 12).

### THE PROGRESSIVE DETERIORATION OF CHARACTER

In the first half of the narrative, the narrator emphasizes the progressive deterioration of character that sin brings about. David lay with Uriah's wife. David tries to conceal his adulterous act but fails. Later he attempts to have a single man murdered, but instead many fine warriors are also killed. The moral is clear: He who covers up his sins shall never prosper! (Proverbs 28:13). All human actions are observed by a divine eye. What David did displeased the Eternal (II Samuel 11:27).

It is only at the end of his account of David's major sins that the narrator passes explicit judgement on his actions. This is because he wishes to demonstrate that one sin leads to another. After David married Bathsheba and she gave birth to the child who resulted from their adulterous union, the narrator specifies that God is displeased with what "David had done" (*idem*).

David's transgressions began with his rude staring; then he violated the commandment against coveting a neighbor's wife. This led to the breaking of the

Dr. Garsiel, Professor of Bible at Bar-Ilan University, was recently appointed head of the Department for Israel Studies. His most important work published so far is: *The Kingdom of David, Researches in History and Studies in Historiography*.

law prohibiting adultery. Then he sinned again by failing to heed the commandment, "You shall not murder," culminating indirectly in the death of additional warriors. This is indeed a penetrating portrayal of the dynamics of degeneration.

#### REPENTANCE AND ACCEPTANCE

However, the second half of this narrative (Ch. 12) describes Nathan's reproach and David's repentance and acceptance of the Lord's punishment. The didactic point here is that so great is the power of contrition and genuine repentance that God is ready to forgive even the most terrible sin or combination of sins, "He who confesses (his sins) and forsakes them is forgiven" (Proverbs 28:13).

At the same time, however, David, in order to gain complete absolution, must suffer for the rest of his life. Ahead of him lurks punishment befitting his crimes (the tragedy of his "love" child, of Amnon and Tamar, and of Absalom). David does not get off lightly. His rather lengthy series of chastisements follows the Biblical law of retribution.

There is a sharp distinction between the historian's view of the revolt of Absalom and Sheba ben Bichri and that of the Biblical narrator. The latter, in contrast to the former, plays down the sociological and tribal aspect of these rebellions and transforms them into a series of divine punishments of David for his violations of the moral code. It is this ethical outlook that colors the narrator's description of the "historical" events of Israel's great ruler.

#### FEELINGS OF THE BIBLICAL CHARACTERS IRRELEVANT

The literary style and the construction of the entire narrative are shaped by the narrator's ethical motive. He deliberately refrains from depicting at length the deep and turbulent feelings of the characters connected with the sinful episode. Some scholars have explored the narrator's refusal to tell the reader how David, Bathsheba, and Uriah felt at certain crucial points in the drama as indications of the fact that he was not concerned with experiences or emotions as such but rather with deeds. However, this analysis is only partially true.

It seems evident that if the narrator would have offered us more information about his character's feelings, then he would have defeated his main moral aim. The background material presented in this series of articles makes it quite certain

that the narrator could have easily supplied the reader with many more details about the various characters and their psychological reactions than he actually offered. However, this sort of presentation, while giving greater scope to his artistic and imaginative talents, would have detracted from his higher ethical goal.

The narrator could very well have expanded his account of David's troubled thoughts at various stages of this episode. He could have depicted David's growing alarm after he had succumbed to his passion and mistakenly thought that after his first encounter with Bathsheba had concluded, the affair and its consequences were ended too. Then his genuine dismay as the matter grows more and more involved could have been described, as well as his desperate efforts to exert all of his wisdom and royal powers to arrive at a way out involving no hurt to any of those involved in the affair.

#### NO SYMPATHY FOR DAVID OR BATHSHEBA

But, had the narrator depicted at length David's increasing concern over Uriah's stubborn refusal to allow him to prevent tragedy from reaching all the participants or had he offered lengthy observations of David's feelings during the chain of events, then the reader of the tale would have been led to sympathize with the King, despite his grave sins. In that case the narrator would have defeated his didactic purpose which was to show that it is impossible to conceal one's sins, either from the eyes of God or from the eyes of men. Moreover, one sin leads to another and one who attempts to cover over his wrongdoing only adds to the severity of his misdeeds.

On the other hand, the narrator could have given us a detailed description of Bathsheba's early opposition to David and her dismay when she realized that she could not ward off his royal advances. He could also have graphically portrayed her alarming discovery of her pregnancy and her innermost fears as she learned about her husband's prolonged stay in Jerusalem and his refusal to return home.

He could have told further about her being torn by the fear that her condition would soon become evident to all those who knew her and were very aware that her husband could not possibly be the father of the child that she was carrying. An attempt could have been made to analyze Bathsheba's thoughts as she was compelled to marry the very man who was the cause of all her agony.

As for Uriah, the narrator had an excellent opportunity to write about the long

and tragic day when the Hittite frenzily questioned the police guard and groped for crumbs of information from the palace servants. More could have been said about Uriah's dismay as his fears are confirmed and he is forced to confront the man who cuckolded him, his sworn king. A vivid description could also have been given of Uriah's troubled musings as he returned to his comrades at arms and prepared to resume his battle, against the enemy.

However, if the narrator had chosen these several opportunities to analyze the emotional responses of Bathsheba or Uriah at any length, then the reader would find it almost impossible to forgive David. He would reject as completely unjustified the partial absolution offered by Nathan because the King's crime was so horrible. In this instance, the narrator would have been unable to gain his second objective, which was to demonstrate the powerful effect of confession and contrition!

#### THE MORAL GOAL OF THE NARRATIVE

It is abundantly evident that the narrator dealt briefly with the psychological struggles of his characters, touching on them as indirectly and subtly as possible, because of his moral goal. His aim was neither to achieve an epic style nor to demonstrate his literary gifts of irony or wit. He felt that any additional probing on his part into the inner emotions of the characters would have compelled his readers to become more personally involved with the tragic figures in this drama.

Reader identification with any of the characters would detract from the key point of the story. The basic motivation of the narrator, we must conclude, was not to demonstrate his artistic ability in portraying powerfully human characters nor his desire to satisfy his readers' curiosity about royal scandal or personality quirks. His primary role, instead, was to educate his readers about proper religious and spiritual values by means of his presentation of the retribution meted out to a great historical figure for his wrongdoing and of the power of repentance.

Translated and adapted by Professor Herschel Levine from an article in *Beth Mikra*, the Hebrew quarterly of the World Jewish Bible Society.

# THE LAWS OF MOURNING

## BIBLICAL SOURCES

BY HYMAN ROUTTENBERG

### Part III

The sages derived from Jeremiah that one is not to weep for the dead excessively. "Weep ye not for the dead", that is, in excess, "neither bemoan him" (22:10) beyond measure. How is that applied? Three days for weeping, and seven for lamenting, and thirty to refrain from cutting the hair and donning pressed clothes. Hereafter, the Holy One, blessed be He, says, 'Ye are not more compassionate towards him than I.'

— Mo'ed Katan 27b

For all the other dead one makes a rent of a hand-breadth; for one's father or mother he rends his clothes till he bares his heart (chest). R. Abbahu asks: What text is there which teaches this? "Then David took hold on his clothes and rent them" (II Samuel 1:11), and there is no taking hold of anything by less than a hand's breadth.

— Mo'ed Katan 22b

From David we learn that a mourner is not permitted to sit on a bed or on a chair, as it is said, "And the king rose and rent his garments and he lay on the earth (II Samuel 13:31). Some derive it from what is said in the Book of Job, "And they sat with him on the earth" (2:13).

Mo'ed Katan 21a

One is not to carry out the laws of mourning publicly during a festival, as it is said, "And thou shalt rejoice in the feast" (Deuteronomy 16:14).

"אל תבכו למת ואל תנדו לו" (ירמ' כ"ב, י), אל תבכו למת יותר מדאי ואל תנדו לו יותר מכשיעור, הא כיצד, שלושה ימים לבכי, ושבעה להספד, ושלושים לגיהוץ ולתספורת מכאן ואילך, אמר הקדוש ברוך הוא אי אתם רחמנים בו יותר ממני. — מועד קטן כ"ו:

על כל המתים כולן קורע טפח על אביו ועל אמו עד שיגלה את לבו. א"ר אבהו מאי קרא, "ויחוק דוד בבגדיו ויקרעם" (שמואל ב', א', י"א), ואין אחיזה פחות מטפח. — מועד קטן כ"ב:

ישב על גבי מטה, על גבי כסא... לא יצא ידי חובתו דכתיב "ויקם המלך ויקרע את בגדיו וישכב ארצה" (שמואל ב' י"ג, ל"א). — מועד קטן כ"א.

אבל אינו נוהג אבילותו ברגל שנאמר "ושמחת בחגך" (דברים ט"ז, י"ד):

A positive precept to celebrate the festival which is incumbent on the community overrides a positive precept which is incumbent on him as an individual (i.e. the observance of mourning).

— Mo'ed Katan 14b

Neither does one observe the laws of mourning on the Sabbath for it is said, "The blessing of the Lord brings riches" (Proverbs 10:22), this is the blessing of the Sabbath; "And he sends no sorrow with them (*ibid.*), this is mourning.

— Yerushalmi, Mo'ed Katan 3:5

When one comes to comfort the mourner, says R. Johanan, he is not to open the conversation, as it is said, "So they sat down with him on the ground . . . and none spoke a word unto him; for they saw that his grief was very great" (Job 2:13). "After this Job opened his mouth" (Job 3:1) . . . "Then answered Eliphaz the Temanite" (Job 4:1).

— Mo'ed Katan 28b

The sages derive from the Book of Proverbs that the mourner is to be given wine to drink in order to ease his sorrow. Thus Ulla said, and some say that it was taught in a Baraitha: Ten cups of wine the scholars have instituted to be drunk in the house of the mourner.

Kethuboth 8b

Rashi says the mourner is to be given much wine as it is written: "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto the bitter in soul" (Proverbs 31:6).

R. Hiyya b. Abba, R. Ammi and R. Isaac were once seated in the marquee of R. Isaac b. Eleazar when a discussion was begun among them: How

אי אבילות דמעיקרא הוא, אתי עשה דרבים דחי עשה דיחיד, ואי אבילות דהשתא הוא, לא אתי עשה דיחיד דחי עשה דרבים.

— מועד קטן י"ד:

. . . בא להדיעני שאין אבל בשבת דכתיב "ברכת ה' היא חעשיר" (משלי י', כ"ב). זו ברכת שבת "ולא יוסף עצב עמה" (שם), זו אבילות. — ירו' מועד קטן ג', ה'

א"ר יוחנן: אין מנחמין ושאין לומר דבר עד שיפתח אבל שנאמר "אחר כן פתח איוב את פיהו" (איוב ג', א) והדר "ויעץ אליפו התימני" (איוב ד', א).

— מועד קטן כ"ח:

אמר עולא ואמרי לה במתניתא תנא עשרה כוסות חקנו חכמים בבית האבל. — כתובות ח':

עשרה כודות — להרבות לו בשתייה דכתיב "תנו שכר לאובד ויין למרי נפש" (משלי ל"א, ו).

מנין לאבילות שבעה? דכתיב "והפכתי תגיכם לאבל" (עמוס ח', י), מה חג

do we know that the observance of mourning is for seven days? From the text, "And I shall turn your feasts (Passover and Tabernacles) into mourning (Amos 8:10); just as the 'Feast' lasts seven days, so the period of mourning is also for seven days. But why not draw an analogy with the Feast of Weeks which lasts but one day? That analogy is needed as explained by Resh Lakish: Whence is it derived that on the receipt of belated tidings (after thirty days), one mourns for only one day? From the text: "And I shall turn your feasts into mourning" (*ibid.*); and we find the Feast of Weeks as an instance where one day's celebration is designated a 'Feast'.

— Mo'ed Katan 20a

שבעה אף אבילות שבעה,  
ואימא עצרת דחד יומא,  
ההוא מיבעי ליה לכדריש  
לקיש, דאמר ריש לקיש  
משום ר' יהודה נשיאה, מנין  
לשמועה רחוקה שאינה  
נוהגת אלא יום אחד דכתיב  
"והפכתי חגיכם לאבל"  
(שם), ואשכחן עצרת  
דאיקרי חד יומא חג.  
— מועד קטן כ'.

## BIBLE NEWS AROUND THE WORLD

### ISRAEL

In memory of what would have been David Ben Gurion's nintieth birthday, the Bible Study Circle he founded twenty years ago met at Sde Boker last Chol Hamoed Succot. President Ephraim Katzir spoke at the grave and then the group went to the Midrasha for a program of study.

The Bible Study Circle has been meeting regularly in the Bet Hanassi ever since it was started by Ben Gurion who headed it during his active days and whose mantle has fallen on the successive presidents of Israel. At every session one or more eminent Bible scholars discuss in depth a selected theme. Many of the papers are later published in the Bet Mikra of the World Jewish Bible Society.

### ARGENTINA

THE BIBLE Organization of Argentina, which was organized by Prof. Zvi Bronstein, is very active in making Bible study available to the Argentina Jewish Community. It conducts Bible sessions of a high quality, and helps in the formation of study groups in cities and towns where Jews reside. Dr. Gevanyahu, during his recent visit in South America, was called upon to help in the latter project.

## A REPORT TO THE PRESIDENT

Upon the return of Professor Haim Gevaryahu, Chairman of the World Jewish Bible Society from his two year term of teaching at Dropsie University in Philadelphia, a group of the WJBS leadership met Professor Ephraim Katzir, President of the State of Israel and head of the WJBS, for a review of the activities of the Society around the world.

Dr. Gevaryahu (left) is seen presenting the report of Bible activity in the United States, indicating the many laymen's Bible groups meeting at homes and at synagogues.

Dr. Mordecai Sochen then told of a new venture being initiated by the Society aiming toward the encouragement of Bible study by students and laymen, leading to the granting of a Jerusalem Certificate upon the completion of designated studies and examinations.



*Left to right: Professor Haim Gevaryahu, Dr. Mordecai Sochen, Dr. Louis Katzoff, Professor André Neher, President Ephraim Katzir.*

*Not in picture: Moshe Goldstein, Othniel Margalit, Gur Aryeh Sadeh*

Dr. Louis Katzoff, Editor of Dor le-Dor, reported on the progress of the Society's English quarterly. He emphasized the unifying factor of the periodical in reaching out to the membership in all five continents. Interestingly, scholarly laymen are sending in articles for publication which, added to the contributions of professors of Bible, offer the quarterly a wider scope of expression for all Jewry. In addition, an attempt is now being made by the Society to receive information about existing Bible groups through spot questionnaires in respective issues.

Professor André Neher told about the new French translation of the Bible just recently published. The translator, Professor André Shurake, once served as the Advisor to Prime Minister Ben Gurion on Aliyah from the Edoth Hamizrach and later as Vice Mayor of the Municipality of Jerusalem and head of its Department of Culture. Professor Neher felt that the impact of the new translation will go far in the enhancement of Bible study in French speaking countries.

Reports on the Beit Hatenakh in Tel Aviv and Bible activities in Israel and in Switzerland were then given by Gur Aryeh Sadeh, Director of the House of the Bible in Tel Aviv, Moshe Goldstein, Director of the Tel Aviv branch of the World Jewish Bible Society, and Othniel Margalit, prominent banker and Biblical scholar (not in Picture).

Finally, President Katzir responded in encouraging words on the progress of the Society. "World Jewry must cope with the many centrifugal forces infringing upon the Jewish consciousness negatively. What better way is there to enhance Jewish awareness than a return to the source of our identity, the Bible?" He congratulated the Society and added his blessings for fruitful endeavors in the future.

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### "עין למקרא"

מאת מזל ויגרט

הספר כולל 72 שיחות שהמחברת שידרה ב"קול ישראל" במדור פרקי היום  
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החברה לחקר המקרא, בשביל הגב' ויגרט

רח' אברבנאל 18

ירושלים

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

*The article: Koheleth Re-Interpretation, by Mr. Jacob Felton, which appeared in Vol. V, No. 1 of Dor le-Dor, has raised considerable controversy. Notable amongst those who took issue with some of the thoughts and interpretations on Koheleth were Rabbi Professor Louis I. Rabinowitz, Deputy Mayor of Jerusalem and Othniel Margalith, banker and noted Bible scholar. It would take too much space to have all these letters published. We chose several of these letters and the collective answer by Mr. Felton to issues raised by our correspondents.*

Dear Mr. Felton,

I read your article on Koheleth in Dor le Dor with great interest, and I have the following comments to make:

1. I do not know whether you are justified in disposing completely of the factual statement of the Talmud that the body of Koheleth, unlike its beginning and end, are, so to speak, "not Divrei Torah".
2. You spoil your case by special pleading. I refer to your interpretation of the verse that wisdom is superior to folly as light is superior to darkness, "but only as a flash of light is brighter than darkness. The flash does not last." I cannot accept that the verse bears such a limiting interpretation. The superiority is permanent!
3. Your interpretation of Mi Yodea is most persuasive and I congratulate you on it. I feel however that you go just a little too far, and that the alternative, "it is possible" or "it is fervently to be hoped" meets the case much better.

With best wishes

Louis I. Rabinowitz

My dear Mr. Felton,

I read your article on Koheleth with great interest. I disagree with many of your interpretations. In your opening passage you quote the discussion about the exclusion of the book, — but you do not quote— *בנא בתרה* — *בנא ראשון*, *סרק ראשון*: *ש וקהלת*: *ש וקהלת*: *ש וקהלת*. You say that Koheleth was included in the Canon by Ezra and the *אנשי כנסת גדולה* but you do not say that Ben Sira apparently did not know of its inclusion and *משנה ידיים ד' ר'* (if I remember correctly) enumerates Koheleth as separate from the Canon.

I also tried to follow your argument about *יתרון*. Now the accepted meaning is:—profit, superiority, advantage, gain. If you wish to explain it as meaning "left-over," you ought to quote some authorities for this. The dictionaries give the established meaning of words, and although I do not deny the possibility of the meaning which you ascribe to it, I would like some authority to confirm this. The form ending in *ן*—is comparatively rare and gramaticians will have dealt with its meaning, — and I would like to hear their opinion. Moreover, the words *יתר*, *יותר* are used sometimes for leftover (*טו*, *ט"ו*, *ט"ז*, *שמואל א'*, *שמואל ב'*). If the author wanted to use a word in this sense, he would have used *היתר*.

Your interpretation is ingenious and attractive, provided you can bring proof and authority for it.

Similarly, I cannot accept without further proof and authority your interpretation of **אני יודע** as **מי יודע** I am convinced. In II Sam. 12:22 you can perhaps insert such a meaning, and also in Jonah and Joel, but in Psalms 90:11 it clearly is an exclamation of "who can understand the extent of . . .", and in Esther it clearly means a doubting, "who will remember if to your credit". As to Jonah and Joel, the passage is usually interpreted to mean: — go and repent, you sinners, but the mere act of repentance as such *does not guarantee* God's forgiveness — MAYBE He will forgive and MAYBE not. There is no automatic quid pro quo, no "forgiveness automatically following on repentance," but MAYBE God will be merciful.

Therefore, your interpretation of **מי יודע** as "I am convinced" is contrary to accepted meaning, and until you can support it with authorities, I shall have to differ.

On the other hand, if you can support your contentions, then your conclusions and interpretations are most attractive, and certainly novel.

Othniel Margalit

#### MR. FELTON REPLIES (EXCERPTS)

##### *Hiding of Kohelet*

Modern Bible scholars quote (Bab. Shabbat 30b) to prove "already the Talmud Sages regarded Koheleth as heretical, self-contradictory." Heresy does not come into it, but a mere talmudic game, of which there are hundreds similar ones, comparing one phrase in which "joy" — **שמחה** and **שחוק** — is credited with value, while, in another phrase, it is classed as vain. (Two different expressions for joy are quoted). Anyone familiar with Talmud technique could have supplied the answer: the joy of carrying out a Mitzvah is worthwhile; other joys are hollow.

I said that the Sages merely expressed themselves in a sensational manner, to

add spice to their words. Since writing my article, I believe to have found a clue to why they used this sensational language. The two sides of folio 30 in G'mara Shabbat are filled with criticism of King Solomon. The Sages did not like his mode of life, such as his many inter-marriages, even if they were contracted to maintain national peace. The Rabbis were especially incensed over Solomon's building altars for wives, on which they offered sacrifices to their idols. By contrast, King David's sin with Bat-Sheva had been forgiven by God. It matters not who actually wrote Koheleth. The Talmud Sages had no doubt that it was Solomon.

Similarly, they were sure that Ezra and the Men of the Great Synod had decided which Books to include in the Canon. If they would have hidden away Koheleth and Proverbs, they would, in their own eyes, have nullified the decision of Ezra and the Men of the Great Synod. I regard it as unthinkable that the Talmud Sages would have even contemplated doing away with these Books on the ground of such trifling, easily resolved "contradictions".

As to your quotation from Baba Batra 15a that "Hezekiah wrote Kohelet": Old and new scholars, Rashi and the Encyclopedia Judaica, are at one that what is meant there is that he edited or copied it.

You write that "apparently Ben Sira did not know of Kohelet's inclusion" in the Canon. I am no authority on Ben Sira, but the Encyclopedia Judaica writes under "Bible," vol. IV, col. 824: "Ben Sira, who shows familiarity with all other biblical books, does not mention Daniel or Esther." This indicates that Ben Sira counted Koheleth among the biblical Books.

#### *What are my authorities?*

You demand that I "quote some authorities" for my interpretation of "Yitron" and "Yodea." I cannot accept your allocation of the onus of proof. It is legitimate to re-interpret a biblical Book, even if one cannot adduce "some authority." There would have been no need or justification for writing my article if everything had been said already.

In any novel interpretation, one must

not force either the rules of meaning or grammar. The resulting new light that one sheds on the text must conform to what the author of the Book was likely to have had in mind. My rendering of "Yitron" allows a most satisfactory understanding of Koheleth as one coherent, logical exposition of Jewish philosophy, while my definition of "Yado'a" as different from "to know" solves many problems throughout the Tenakh.

*Yitron:* This particular construction of "hoteir" —הותיר—is only to be found in Kohelet. As you say, the ending "on" is rare, but Kohelet is also the only Book in which "Kishron" occurs (2,21; 4, 4; 5, 10), and also "Shilton" (8:4,8). Perhaps the author liked the pleasing sound, perhaps he wished to express something exclusive. You demand that I quote "some authorities" for the meaning "left over." Peculiarly enough, you only mention I Sam. 15:15 as bearing that meaning. In fact, the Torah itself and other Books abound with the word in this particular nuance. In connection with sacrifices: they each had a specific span of holiness, such as: one day; two days and the intervening night. Beyond that span of time the meat became "notar" (נותר) (Ex 12:10; 29:34; Lev. 1:16f; 8:32; 14:18, 29; 19:6). In many other places, "הותיר" constructions refer to people left over, after others had perished (Gen. 44:20; Ex. 10:15; Lev. 10:16; Jud. 21:7, 16; I Kings 19:10, 14; Is. 1:8; Jer. 44:4). I could have given you more than twice the quotations, but I surely have given you "authorities" to prove that

"hoteir" often means "left over" after others have perished. What I have done is merely to extend this to a good, wise and rich person's own afterlife. Is anything left over? Has even the best and wisest life any lasting value?

On Eccl. 2:13: You oppose my interpretation of the Yitron of Chochmah over folly. I wrote that the Yitron of light over darkness is only "as a flash." You maintain that it is permanent.

Chochmah in Kohelet has many meanings: wisdom, philosophy, technical skill, inventiveness, the skill of the architect and the landscaper.

A monograph of Chochmah in Kohelet could be fascinating. I have assembled more or less all the places where Kohelet speaks of Chochmah. It shows how much Kohelet wished that Chochmah would furnish the answer to his search for a permanent Yitron. However, as he is honest and a realist, he rejects the permanence of Chochmah again and again, without exception.

I have noted the following verses: 1:13ff; 2:9, 14, 15, 16, 19; 4:13; 6:8; 1:5, 7, 11f; 1:16, 19, 23, 25; 8:1, 5, 16; 9:1, 10, 11, 13ff; 10:1, 10, 12.

In many of these verses the transience of Chochmah is stressed. It is superior to foolishness, just as light is superior to darkness. Of light he says that it is sweet (11:7f), but eventually, it will be dimmed (12:2). Chochmah is not permanent. It passes like a flash of light.

*Yado'a*: In stating that I made no difference between "Yado'a" and "Mi Yode'a," as if both were to be translated as "I am convinced," you have misread

my article. On pp. 33 and 34, I wrote that in all the eight other places where *Mi Yode'a* is to be found in the Bible, the meaning is: I am convinced the matter is as I have stated (or: I wish with all my heart the matter were as I have stated), but I cannot prove it. It belongs to the realm of belief. — The positive *Yado'a*, on the other hand, can have one of two meanings: either, I know it without any doubt; or, to have experienced it bodily, either pleurably, in marital relations, or painfully such as Gideon's flogging the elders of Succot (Jud. 8:16. — this was in my original manuscript).

I should like to give you two more instances: a) the two paragraphs of Ex. 33:12-23 are filled with Moses' request for *Yediat Hashem*. This, after God had spoken to him any number of times as *Hashem*, during the Ten Plagues, the Exodus, the Revelation at Sinai and after. In v. 13, he still asks "V'eido'acha" — ויֵדָעְךָ—. This shows that *Yado'a* goes much further than "to know." It also shows that the whole Bible-critical literature around Ex. 6:3, as if the patriarchs had not known God by the Name of *HaShem*, is wrong. — In the book which I am writing on why the Torah uses the Names of *Elokim* and *E-Shadd*... (in places where grammar and meaning don't prevent the use of the Tetragrammaton), my understanding of Ex. 6:3 gives a clear guide as to the other five places where the Name of *E-Shadd*... is found.

b) Esther 6:1; "uMordecai yada" does not simply indicate that Mordecai had heard of Haman's terrible edict, but that

he understood the situation completely. He saw the full implications of the two opposing forces: Haman's unreasoning, bloodthirsty anti-Semitism which was not open to any negotiation or amelioration; and, on the other hand, God's having "provided healing in advance of the affliction," by placing Esther in the king's palace. This appreciation of the situation convinced

Mordecai that he had to risk his own life, by appearing in rags in front of the palace; and also that he had to demand of Esther to risk her life. Should she be unwilling to do so, then "enlargement and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place" (6:14). Mordecai was sure of that, for he understood the full depth of what had happened: "Mordechai yada".

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## TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

*With these pages we are continuing the second triennial Bible reading calendar, beginning with the first chapter of Joshua and concluding with the Book of Chronicles at the end of the third year. The sequence of the daily chapters is interrupted in order to allow for the readings connected with the Sidra of the Week and the holidays.*

April—May 1977	אייר תשל"ז		May—June 1977	סיון תשל"ז	
T 19	Psalms 10	א	W 18	Psalms 31	א
W 20	Psalms 11	ב	Th 19	Psalms 32	ב
W 21	Psalms 12	ג	F 20	במדבר	ג
F 22	תזריע - מצורע	ד	Sa 21	במדבר	ד
Sa 23	יום העצמאות תזריע - מצורע	ה	Su 22	ערב שבועות	ה
Su 24	Psalms 13	ו	M 23	שבועות	ו
M 25	Psalms 14	ז	T 24	שבועות	ז
T 26	Psalms 15	ח	W 25	Psalms 33	ח
W 27	Psalms 16	ט	Th 26	Psalms 34	ט
Th 28	Psalms 17	י	F 27	נשא	י
F 29	אחרי מות - קדושים	יא	Sa 28	נשא	יא
Sa 30	אחרי מות - קדושים	יב	Su 29	Psalms 35	יב
Su 1	Psalms 18	יג	M 30	Psalms 36	יג
M 2	Psalms 19	יד	T 31	Psalms 37	יד
T 3	Psalms 20	טו	W 1	Psalms 38	טו
W 4	Psalms 21	טז	Th 2	Psalms 39	טז
Th 5	Psalms 22	יז	F 3	בהעלתך	יז
F 6	אמור	יח	Sa 4	בהעלתך	יח
Sa 7	אמור	יט	Su 5	Psalms 40	יט
Su 8	Psalms 23	כ	M 6	Psalms 41	כ
M 9	Psalms 24	כא	T 7	Psalms 42	כא
T 10	Psalms 25	כב	W 8	Psalms 43	כב
W 11	Psalms 26	כג	Th 9	Psalms 44	כג
Th 12	Psalms 27	כד	F 10	שלח לך	כד
F 13	בהר - בחקתי	כה	Sa 11	שלח לך	כה
Sa 14	בהר - בחקתי	כו	Su 12	Psalms 45	כו
Su 15	Psalms 28	כז	M 13	Psalms 46	כז
M 16	Psalms 29	כח	T 14	Psalms 47	כח
T 17	Psalms 30	כט	W 15	Psalms 48	כט
			Th 16	Psalms 49	ל

TRIENNIAL BIBLE READING CALENDAR

June—July 1977			תמוז תשל"ז	July—Aug 1977			מנחם אב תשל"ז
F	17	קרה	א	Sa	16	מטות - מסעי שבת ראש חודש	א
Sa	18	קרה	ב	Su	17	Psalms 70	ב
Su	19	Psalms 50	ג	M	18	Psalms 71	ג
M	20	Psalms 51	ד	T	19	Psalms 72	ד
T	21	Psalms 52	ה	W	20	Psalms 73	ה
W	22	Psalms 53	ו	Th	21	Psalms 74	ו
Th	23	Psalms 54	ז	F	22	דברים	ז
F	24	חקת	ח	Sa	23	שבת חזון דברים	ח
Sa	25	חקת	ט	Su	24	מגילת איכה צום תשעה באב	ט
Su	26	Psalms 55	י	M	25	Psalms 75	י
M	27	Psalms 56	יא	T	26	Psalms 76	יא
T	28	Psalms 57	יב	W	27	Psalms 77	יב
W	29	Psalms 58	יג	Th	28	Psalms 78	יג
Th	30	Psalms 59	יד	F	29	ואתחנן	יד
F	1	בלק	טו	Sa	30	שבת נחמו ואתחנן	טו
Sa	2	בלק	טז	Sa	31	Psalms 79	טז
Su	3	Psalms 60	יז צום י"ז בתמוז	M	1	Psalms 80	יז
M	4	Psalms 61	יח	T	2	Psalms 81	יח
T	5	Psalms 62	יט	W	3	Psalms 82	יט
W	6	Psalms 63	כ	Th	4	Psalms 83	כ
Th	7	Psalms 64	כא	F	5	עקב	כא
F	8	פינחס	כב	Sa	6	עקב	כב
Sa	9	פינחס	כג	Su	7	Psalms 84	כג
Su	10	Psalms 65	כד	M	8	Psalms 85	כד
M	11	Psalms 66	כה	T	9	Psalms 86	כה
T	12	Psalms 67	כו	W	10	Psalms 87	כו
W	13	Psalms 68	כז	Th	11	Psalms 88	כז
Th	14	Psalms 69	כח	F	12	ראה	כח
F	15	מטות - מסעי	כט	Sa	13	ראה	כט
				Su	14	Psalms 89	ל

עשה תורתך קבע

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דור לדור

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