



Parsha Bamidbar
Hosea 2:1-22
May 24, 2014 / 24 Iyyar 5774

Terms to learn: Ishi is the term in Hebrew for husband and replaces the phrase Baali which can mean my lord, my master, or my Baal.

Background:

This is a prophecy directed at the Northern Kingdom and depending upon when it was written it could have been read as a warning to the people in the Southern (Judah-Jerusalem) Kingdom. The term Israel refers to the Northern Kingdom which was invaded by Assyria twice. The first time was in 733 B.C.E.; the second time occurred in 722 B.C.E. and resulted in the exile of the ten Northern tribes. Even though the language of the first chapter is the same as the second Hosea's message in chapter two contradicts his earlier message.

Chapter 1 verses 3-4 inform us that Hosea married a woman named Gomer and she gave birth to a son. God instructed Hosea to name him Jezreel, for I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the bloody deeds at Jezreel, and put an end to the monarchy of the House of Israel. In the day I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. The house of Jehu was the last stable dynasty of Israel 842-747 BCE. Jehu was the son of Jezebel.

The name Jezreel means El/God sows, and has numerous connotations. It can mean "sowing" or scattering seed which could explain what God will do to the house of Jezreel as a punishment for the murder of Navoth and the assassination of his son at the urging of Ahab and Jezebel in order to seize his property. Jezreel is also a plain in central Israel with a city on its perimeter. The story of Ahab and Jezebel can be found in 1 Kings 21:1-24; and 2 Kings 9:21-35.

Love and lust play a large part in this morning's haftarah and the doom predicted in the first chapter is transformed in the second into a prophecy of love and of hope. Judah and the people of Israel will be reunited. It will be a marvelous occurrence! Judah will finally recognize that Baal is not their mother and certainly not God's wife. Judah will give up the attraction it has for what Baal offers, God will disown those who continue to follow Baal and will pursue his people as a lover, a lover who understands his people. God offers mature love. He will restore his people to positions of prosperity and commit to them eternally. The haftarah concludes with the declaration of love between God and his people, a declaration which is repeated every morning when one wraps their tefillin around their hand. It is also often used during the betrothal

ceremony by women who in some traditions are not permitted to recite the traditional words of betrothal to their future spouse.

One can assume that our ancestors living in the aftermath of the Bar Kokba rebellion chose to insert prophecies of hope into our liturgy.

The children of Israel are on a journey in this morning's Torah reading. The journey through the wilderness (midbar) in the aftermath of the Exodus requires learning how to engage in a more sophisticated relationship. It is not one of golden calves and physical demonstration. New patterns of behavior must be learned. Is this not dissimilar from what we need to do if we wish our relationships to continue to survive? Don't couples of any age need to learn to be spouses instead of masters or mistresses? Don't couples of any age need to learn and relearn not to succumb to the gods of materialism and one upmanship?

This week's Haftarah commentary is reprinted from one written for the Unraveller for May 15, 2010 by Rabbi Charles Simon, Executive Director of the FJMC and author of "Building A Successful Volunteer Culture: Finding Meaning in Service in the Jewish" Jewish Lights Publishing.