

Bellows Family

MATAN AL HAPEREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly | Tanach Learning Program

In memory of Mina bat Harav Peretz and Chaya Rivka z'l

Perek 7

In perakim 7-8 Hoshea rebukes the people of the kingdom of Israel and their leaders for the evils which have spread among them. Perek 7 begins with a description of the decay of the political system in the kingdom of Israel, which we see from how often the kings change, the different rebellions and coups and the alliances forged with the local nations. Deceit and falsehood are the main features of the political culture in Israel: treachery and intrigue prevail in the internal leadership and betrayal is found of both the political treaties and of God.

1.

"(T)he evils of Samaria" are central to the first unit (1-3) and are mentioned three times within it. Note the description of the features of these actions in pasuk 1 and the increased severity of these actions in pesukim 2 and 3. See the **Radak's** commentary on pasuk 3:

Every day they please their king with the evil that they do, the oppression and cruelty, for he supports them. The spells which they cast and the lies that they tell to their peers please the princes, for they agree with them.

2.

In pesukim 4-7 the prophet focuses on the king and his princes who are mentioned at the end of the previous unit, and describes the corruption of the leaders which brings to the disintegration of the kingdom. Central to this unit is the image of the baker who is stoking the oven and waiting for the dough to rise during the night so that he can bake it in the day. This is an image which portrays the intrigue which characterizes the people of the court, who are waiting for the correct time to carry out their plots. Examine the image of the oven which

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appears in pesukim 4, 6 and 7 and note the different meanings which we can learn from this image in each of the pesukim. See also the following parallel sources and think about how they help us to deepen the message we get from the image in Hoshea: For pasuk 4 see Shir HaShirim 8:6 (also **Rashi** “like an oven heated by the baker: so does their lust burn within them.”) For pasuk 6 – see the description of the society filled with deceit in Yirmiyahu 9:7. For pasuk 7 and the connection to the imagery of eating – see the internal struggle between the brothers in Yishayahu 9:17-18.

Perek 8

The rebuke for the political and religious sins of Israel continues in perek 8. The perek begins with the blowing of the shofar (1), which functions as a warning of the violation of the covenant between Israel and God. In the continuation of the perek the violation of the covenant is explained in detail from both the political and ritual viewpoint: the appointing of kings and princes against the will of God (4), the forging of an alliance with Assyria (9-10), forming the golden calves (5-6) and the building of many altars (11-14).

3.

“They set up a king, but not from Me, they removed, and I did not know” (4) – in the words of Hoshea there is harsh criticism of crowning the kings and princes in Israel.


a | What is the root of the sin in the crowning of the kings? Remember the historic context in which Hoshea is prophesying, a period of frequent changes of kings because of rebellions and murders. Pay attention to the connection which the prophet makes between the sin of the crowning of the kings and the sin of making the golden calves. What do you think this connection between the sins is meant to express?

b | Read Hoshea 13:1-11 and examine how Hoshea deepens the criticism of the institution of kingship which is mentioned at the founding of the monarchy in Shmuel I 8:5-8.

4.

a | In pasuk 5 the prophet declares that the calf which the people formed with their own hands will not save them in their times of trouble. The pasuk can be alternately translated as “Your calf, O Samaria, has cast you off” or as “He has forsaken [you because of] your calf, O Samaria”. Examine the connection between pesukim 3 and 5 – pay attention to who is casting off and the meaning of the casting off in each pasuk. What do you think the linguistic connection teaches us about the connection between the two events?

b | How do these two sins – the founding of the monarchy and the golden calves – contradict the cry of the people in pasuk 2?

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5.

The knowledge and the forgetting of God are some of the central themes in the book of Hoshea. Another aspect of not knowing God is revealed in pasuk 14. What are the palaces or temples (in Hebrew *Heichalot*) that Hoshea is rebuking them for? Consider the fact that this term is usually used in Tanach for the Temple, and see the **Targum Yonatan**:

And Israel forgot the ritual of He who made them, and built temples to the gods.

Try to find another explanation, using the second half of the parallel construction of the pasuk. See also Melachim I 21:1. Is there a connection between the two explanations?

Use also **Y Kaufmann**:


Hoshea is the first prophet, and really the first person in the world, who besmirches militarism as a religious, moral sin. Fortified cities, like temples and palaces, are haughty and show they have forgotten God and put their belief in emptiness.

APPENDIX – “And Ephraim was like a silly dove without a heart”

Different explanations have been given for this description of a “silly dove without a heart”. The Radak explains that the dove is silly because it is not careful to avoid the net spread out at its feet when it comes to eat grain in the field...

It is commonly thought that the dove is a symbol of loyalty and devotion in marriage. This is seen the expression “*If the Torah had not been given we could have learnt ... sexual morality from the dove*” Rashi explains: *for he needs only his spouse*. Indeed, this phenomenon of loyalty between the two doves is true for wild doves, like the rock dove. However, it is not clear for domesticated doves. The prophet Hoshea, who had to marry a wife of harlotry, is doubtful about the phenomenon of love or loyalty between spouses. Hoshea extends this enlightened view to relationships in the animal kingdom. For example “*a wild donkey secluded to himself, Ephraim has hired lovers.*” (8:9) It seems to me that in comparing Ephraim to the “silly dove without a heart” Hoshea is hinting at a common occurrence in doves raised in a dovecote, that the females are tempted by the males, who entice them to return with them to their coop. Some owners of dovecotes specialize in training the male dove to draw the females into their dovecote. In the Talmud it states that one who uses his doves to draw in the doves of others is an unacceptable witness, because he is suspected of theft.

This writer has noticed that even at the time of the incubation of the eggs there is not much loyalty between the doves: when the male dove sits on the eggs, one can sometimes find the female dove in the company of a different male dove. It seems that this is the intention of

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Hoshea in the comparison of Ephraim to a silly dove, which is easily distracted and cheats on its partner. The basis of this comparison is that the nation of Israel has betrayed their God. *“(T)hey called upon Egypt, they went to Assyria.”* They looked for help and support from Assyria and Egypt, alternately. In the continuation of the image of the dove which has left its owner’s dovecote, we are told *“When they go, I will spread My net over them”*. Now there is no choice but for the owner to treat the dove as if it were any other wild bird that must be caught in a net. The owner is determined to catch it and even if it attempts to fly away, *“like the fowl of the heaven I will bring them down. I will chastise them...”* He will shoot it with his arrow like a wild bird. It seems that the fate of the silly dove is to be injured by the arrow, or to be caught in the net... However, sometimes a deceived man has compassion for his recalcitrant wife and tries to get her back. Just as Hoshea prophesied: *“behold I will allure her and lead her into the desert, and I will speak comfortingly to her heart.”*(2:16) Even for the dove who left her nest and wandered distances there is still hope that she will return, *“They shall hasten like a bird from Egypt and like a dove from the land of Assyria; and I will place them in their houses, says the Lord.”* (11:11)

(Free translation of Y Felix, Teva VaAretz BaTanach)

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