

Hashem's Eternal Bond to Us

Haftorat Bamidbar

Hoshea 2:1-22

This Haftorah is one of my favorites. It describes Hashem's faithful love to the Jewish people, and how we are betrothed to Him. No matter how far we stray, Hashem's eternal bond to us will never be severed. It also alludes to many secrets regarding the evolving role of the woman.

The Connection between the Haftorah and the Torah Reading

In order to prepare us for receiving the Torah, Hashem led us through the desolate wilderness to wipe our slate clean from any residue of the impurity absorbed during the Egyptian exile. Extended living in nature, especially in the desolate *midbar* enables deep spiritual transformation in the heart of the children of Israel. The correct English translation of *Bemidbar* is "in the desert." This word is moreover related to the word for speech "*dibur*." From this we learn that the desert speaks (*hamidbar medaber*). I once experienced the silent voice of the wilderness when I joined Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin's annual moonlit desert hike. It was a total transformative experience to be away from all the glitter of establishment. No stores, no houses, no buildings, not even a tree – just sand and endless mountains are all you see. When sitting and meditating alone in the desert, you can feel how all the exterior layers of your identity evaporate, as you get in touch with the core – the spark of G-d – infused within your soul. Just as the desert cleansed Israel of any foreign influence in preparation for receiving the Torah, so does our *haftorah* describe how Hashem brought us to the desert to help us *do teshuva* (repent) from the negative influence absorbed during exile. The *haftorah* compares the Jewish people to a married woman who went astray after foreign men. Hashem (her husband) promises to bring her to the desert, in order to renew his relationship with her. "I will visit upon her the days of the *ba'alim*, to whom she burnt incense, and she adorned herself with her earrings and her jewelry, and went after her lovers, and she forgot Me, says Hashem. Therefore, behold I will allure her and lead her into the desert, and I will speak comfortingly to her heart" (*Hoshea* 2:15-16). Specifically in the desert, will Hashem speak to our heart. For in the desert, we can peel off our exterior layers of attachments to the material – the "earrings, jewelry, lovers etc." Then we can open ourselves to hear the comforting voice of Hashem, whispering through the silent wilderness, to return to Him with a complete heart.

Equality between Husband and Wife Reflects the Ultimate Rectified Relationship with G-d

The Hebrew word for husband *ba'al* literally means "master." This reflects the subservient role of women throughout the times, when they were dependent on their husbands for their very existence. I truly do advocate the importance for the wife to respect and look up to her husband. Yet, on the other hand, if the husband is her master, something in the relationship between them is missing. Through the relationship of servant/master, husband and wife are unable to relate to each other in the very highest way, as a servant cannot fully unite with her master. When he is above her and she doesn't reach the crown of his head, their relationship is not completely matching. For example, if only the husband learns Torah, but the wife never learns, because she is completely overwhelmed by her domestic duties, then it may be difficult for them to conduct a conversation that will be equally meaningful for both. It is not

only the woman who feels the lack, but the husband, as well, will find greater marital satisfaction with a wife who has become his complete equal, with whom he can share his deepest inner Torah thoughts.

Her Husband Will No Longer be Her Master

In this week's *haftorah*, there is an allusion to the changing relationship between husband and wife, from that of servant and master to that of two equal partners. This reflects the evolving relationship between the Jewish people and Hashem, as the husband and wife relationship is a metaphor for the relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. Only when the light of the woman completely matches that of her husband, will the *Shechinah* – the Divine feminine indwelling presence – permeate Israel completely without any partition. At that time Israel will no longer call Hashem *ba'al*, as Hoshea prophesies, "It shall come to pass on that day, says Hashem, you shall call Me *Ishi*, [my man] and you shall no longer call Me *Ba'ali*. And I will remove the names of the *ba'alim* (idols) from her mouth, and they shall no longer be mentioned by their name" (*Hoshea* 2:18-19). The word *ba'al* was also the name of the idol whose service was widespread in Israel. Therefore, relating to Hashem as the *ba'al*, carries the association of idol-worship, as we see in the abovementioned verse: Refraining from calling Hashem *Ba'al* is followed by removing "the names of the idols". There are many levels of Divine service and relating to Hashem as the master is far from the highest. It is worship out of fear rather than from pure love. Hoshea prophesies about the future time, when we will rise to the highest level of serving Hashem with a complete purified heart. At that time, we will no longer call Hashem our master, because we have merged to become one with Him, in the same way that the wife will no longer call her husband her master as they will become unified as one. At the time of *geulah*, we will become purified from base desires to become a complete vessel filled with Hashem's essence. There will no longer be any place within us that separates between us and Hashem. We will become the glove for Hashem's hand to perfectly fit.

Matrimony between Hashem and Israel

Shavuot commemorates the highest transcending moment of Jewish history – the wedding between the Jewish people and Hashem. The Tablets of the Torah were the *Ketubah* (marriage contract), and the mountain on top of their head was the *chupah* (marriage canopy). This is alluded to in the verse that describes the giving of the Torah: "He gave unto Moshe, when he finished (*kekaloto*) speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, two tablets of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of G-d" (*Shemot* 31:18). Rashi notes the connection between the word "*kekaloto*" and the Hebrew word for bride, "*kalah*." "The word "*kekaloto*" is written without the *vav* [so it could be read "*kekalato*" – as his bride] to intimate that the Torah was handed over to Moshe as a gift just as a bride is handed over to the bridegroom" (Rashi *ibid*. See also Rashi, *Shemot* 34:1 where he compares the Tablets of the Torah to a marriage contract, and *Babylonian Talmud, Ta'anit* 26b). Just as on a king's wedding day, he distributes gifts to whoever asks, on Shavuot, we, too, can come to the King, Almighty, and request from Him the blessing of Shavuot. I have heard that especially as the sun rises on Shavuot, the sky is completely open for any request, particularly if related to Torah. Just as the bride and the groom make a commitment to one another on their wedding day, so, too, on Shavuot do the Jewish people and Hashem commit to one another through an oath, as expressed in the concluding verse of our *haftorah*: "I will betroth you to Me forever, and I will betroth you to Me with righteousness and with justice and with loving-kindness and with mercy. And I will betroth you to Me with faith, and you shall know Hashem" (*Hoshea* 2:22).